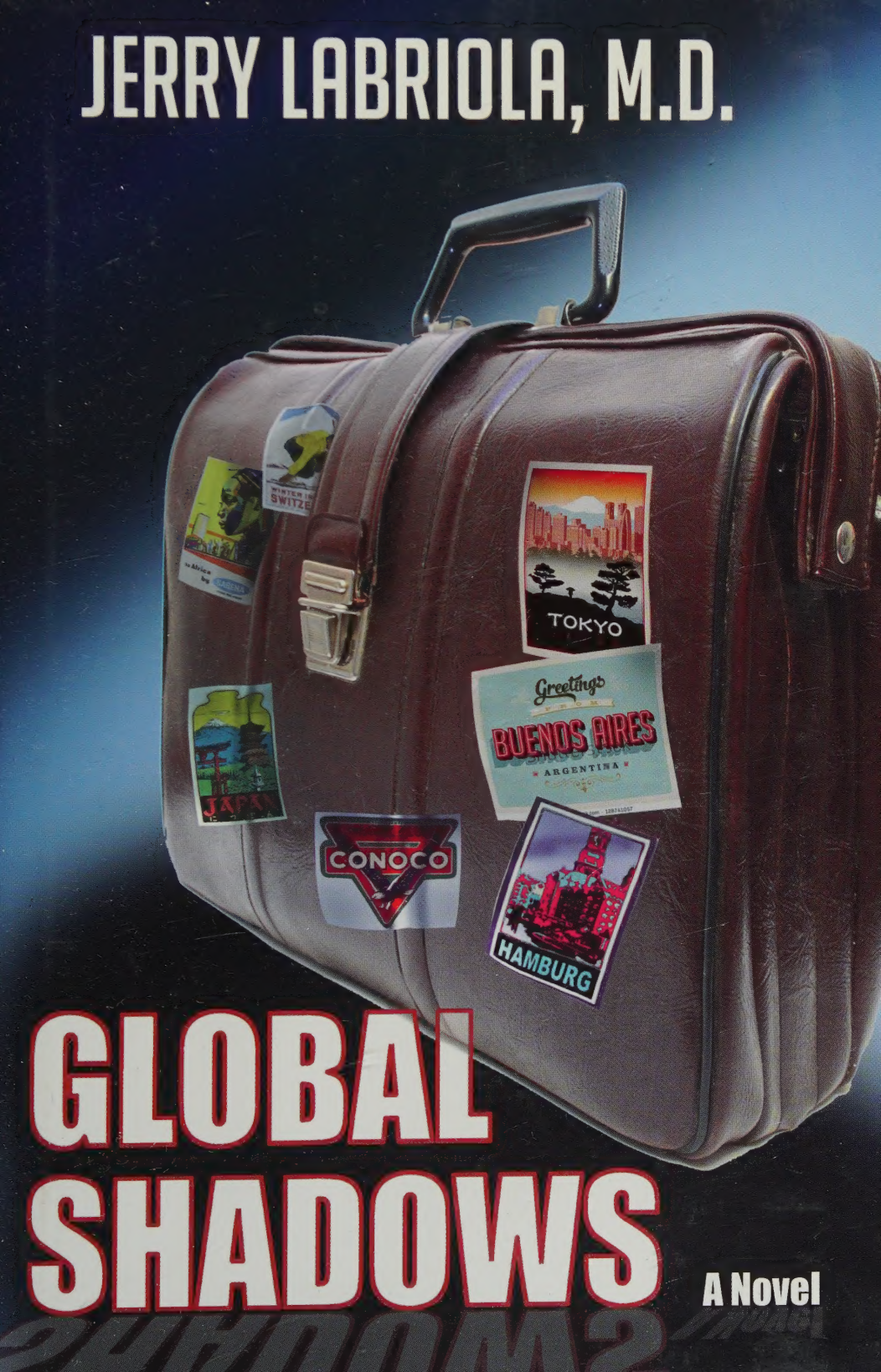
JERRY LABRIOLA, M.D.




# GLOBAL SHADOWS

A Novel

$24.95
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Global Shadows focuses on the plight of Paul D'Arneau, an internationally known treasure hunter and former Yale professor who was dismissed from its faculty because of his interest in mythology.

He is retained by Gens de Vérité, an influential Parisian organization, to investigate the theft of a cabinet containing stem cell research papers, but quickly becomes embroiled in skirmishes he had never anticipated. Nor could he back away.

The story line leads to Germany and its interest in creating a master race for all mankind versus Japan and its interest in ending the world entirely.

Paul and his live-in girl friend, Sylvie Ranet, travel the limits of the globe—France, Argentina, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Japan, St. Helena and central Africa—and must confront numerous and sudden developments. They include murders, prostitutes, and the intrigue of tropical rain forests, savannas and deserts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Even the legacy of Eva Perón is examined.

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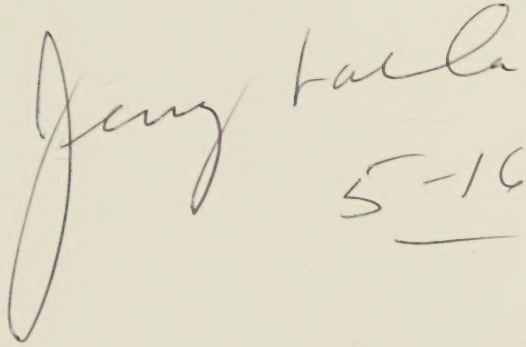

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# Global Shadows

ALSO BY JERRY LABRIOLA

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# Global Shadows

A NOVEL
BY

Jerry Labriola, M.D

STRONG BOOKS

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Printed in the United States of America.

To my wife, Lois, whose knowledge and wit are incorporated herein.

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# NOTE

I have taken the liberty of presenting nearly all dialogue in English to avoid the complexities of multiple languages versus English.

J. L.

# Chapter 1

New Haven, Connecticut
Fall 2013

Treasure hunter Paul D'Arneau had no idea why he was being followed one foggy night, but in checking every minute or so, he was certain he was. Less than two blocks away, a man's large frame seemed to expand as he passed beneath the waterfront's stanchion lights, and whenever Paul slowed his pace, the follower did also.

*Confront the guy or just let it go?* He decided to confront him, but while tightening his left shoulder to insure he hadn't forgotten the Beretta Cougar .45 usually holstered there, the guy slipped into an alley Paul wasn't familiar with, so he abandoned the task. It wasn't the first time he'd been tailed. He chalked up the incident to a holdover resentment from a previous assignment. Despite that possibility, he continued his usual evening stroll beside the empty benches and sleeping dogs, for

he'd learned he did his best thinking there, not too far from Yale, along the waters of Long Island Sound. But it didn't last long, for this time the tail had all but ruined the continuity of his thoughts. He returned home.

Once Paul's arduous investigative work on behalf of France's ancient secret society, *Gens de Vérité*, was completed, he had confined his treasure hunting activities to the New England states. But he had also begun a much anticipated and less demanding job as Chief Administrator at Yale's Sterling Memorial Library. Securing the job was the work of one of the university's largest financial contributors, one of Paul's martial arts friends, and a believer in his innocence of Yale's assertion that he had become a "regressive mythologist." They also criticized his overuse—as they termed it—of quoting famous people in history. Certain university officials had maintained that and other negative claims for over a year, and during that time they accused him of insubordination, even labeling him a "renegade."

Finally, after completing and distributing his latest manuscript, he received a registered letter that stated, "The most far-fetched theories about Napoleon's death and the scandalous side of his life are unacceptable improprieties against the chair you occupy and the faculty you represent, even if your manuscript is a work of fiction." As a result, Paul was demoted from the chairmanship of the Nathaniel Bennett Department of History. But surprisingly, he accepted the library position

without complaint.

Thus, within a year-and-a-half, he had gone from international scholar on the History of the Early Modern Era; a prolific author on books such as *Napoleonic Strategies* and *St. Helena: Napoleon's Final Defeat;* a frequent lecturer at many other educational institutions––to a library administrator. He ended nearly every lecture with what he termed his "comparison piece." It was taken from a copy of a "Good Life Message" delivered by the commodore of the Queen Mary 2 during a cruise Paul had lectured on some years before. The commodore began with compliments to one Brian R. Price Kosg and continued as follows:

If we could shrink the earth's population to a village of precisely 100 people and retain all the existing human ratios in the world … this is what the village would look like:

There would be
57 Asians
21 Europeans
14 from the Western Hemisphere, both north and south
8 Africans
52 would be female, 48 would be male
70 would be non-white, 30 would be white
70 would be non-Christian, 30 would be Christian

93 would be heterosexual, 7 would be homosexual
6 would hold 59% of the world's wealth, all from the U.S.
80 would live in substandard housing
70 would be unable to read
50 would suffer from malnutrition
1 would be near death
1 would be near giving birth
1 (yes only one) would have a college education
1 would own a computer.

When you consider the world from such a compressed perspective, the need for acceptance, understanding and education becomes glaringly apparent.

Here's something to think about:

- If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed then the million people who will not survive this week.

- If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 500 million in the world.

- If you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture or death, you are more blessed than 3 billion people in the world.

- If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead, and a place to sleep peacefully, you are richer than 75% of this world.

- If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and some change in a dish by your bed, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

- If your parents are alive and still married, you are very rare, even in the USA.

- If you can read, you are more blessed than over two billion people who cannot read at all.

So: Work like you don't need the money. Love like you've never been hurt. Dance like nobody's watching. Sing like nobody's listening. And live like it's Heaven on Earth.

Yet Paul was happier in his new job, for it allowed him greater freedom, especially to write, read and lecture about what he believed were the scientific waves of the future.

He continued to read about mythology, however, never trying to convert others to aspects of it that made sense to him, but he never understood and no longer cared why some called him "regressive." Nor did he dwell on Yale's added complaint over his insistence that Napoleon might have been murdered and that the prime suspect was one Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigard, a moderate leader of the French Revolution. Without explanation, targeting Talleyrand had further enraged university officials.

Paul's latest "French Connection" lasted about a month, taking him mainly to Paris but also to Provence, Cairo, Alexandria, London, Elba and St. Helena. The trip had ended three weeks before, and he was still exhausted. At least he thought he was. The assignment for the society had been intense and perilous, so hunkering down for an indeterminate period made total sense to him. As did a newly found gloating demeanor, for he had successfully completed his mission of locating a missing perfume formula, one dating back to the Napoleonic era. It had been a *lucrative* mission that he labeled Scent of Danger, earning him over a million dollars.

The same was true for the previous mission, one that involved determining cause and manner of Napoleon's death. Along with discussions of these cases, he savored the exchange of haunting stories with his good friend and confidant, Dr. David Brooks, once a practicing physician and part-time treasure hunter himself, but now a law enforcement investigator. Neither could explain why, but inevitably the spectacular though checkered career of a now deceased Eva Perón would enter the conversation, she the first lady of Argentina. They both had a strange feeling that something involving her past would surface sooner or later.

Paul's office at the library was the largest in the 10-story building that towered above the others surrounding Yale's Cross-Campus. Also, his oak desk was probably the largest, dwarfing his trim, six-foot,

broad shouldered frame, especially when he sank down in the matching oak chair behind it. He liked it that way, unimposing, almost withdrawn. Ever since he had taken up the responsibilities of international treasure hunting, he felt more at ease and more "capable" if he acted from a position of blending in—whether sitting or standing among others. His rationalization, known only to his friend and soon to be live-in, Sylvie Ranet, was that it was a position from which he could pounce if need be—either physically or in conversation. She had never understood what he meant, as she insisted he be more assertive from the start. And after the few times she had witnessed such a performance, she was prepared for future ones, since he always ushered them in by repeatedly running his fingers through his wavy black hair.

"The hair routine?" she commented one Monday morning. "Nerves all the way."

"Forget nerves," he answered. "It's my decision time."

"Decision for what?"

"Anything."

"But have you ever really pounced?"

"No, but it's good to know I could."

Sylvie flashed an incredulous grin. "And it's best if you're slouched for it?" she asked.

Paul knew he was being taunted, but decided to play along. "Yeah," he responded, "like an eager tiger—*semper paratus*—always ready. It's the motto of the U.S.

Coast Guard. If it's good for them, it's good for me."

She laughed explosively while hugging him.

"What are you laughing about?" he asked.

"At how you rationalize."

It was three o'clock in the afternoon. Paul had had a full lunch but craved another cup of either coffee or tea. He entered a small pantry off a kitchen bordering his library office, inspected the choices brought in earlier by an employee, chose the tea and sat at a coffee table he always argued should be called a "coffee or tea table". The phone rang in his office. Teacup in hand, he returned to his desk and picked up the receiver.

He hadn't expected a phone call from Paris so soon. Leon Cassell, the longtime chairman of *Gens de Vérité* was on the line and, as usual, Paul made fun of his promptness.

"You estimated three weeks at most before checking in with me here at the library," he said. "It's been three weeks and a day. What took you so long? All the evidence is in and the cases are wrapped up to your satisfaction, I assume?"

Paul was referring primarily to their collaboration on the mystery surrounding Napoleon's death. Throughout the bulk of Paul's time on that case, he could never understand why Leon was so interested in any reference to the famous French emperor. It wasn't until Paul followed through with an unusual request that

he understood the reason why.

"Did it all within the first week. No, this is something different, my friend. *Entirely* different."

Paul rubbed a crick in his neck. "So you've finally decided to come clean on what you never even wanted to hint at—all the while I was there?" He tried to decelerate the sudden throb of the moment. "Go ahead though; I'll listen. But you know me by now, Leon. I hate to be kept in the dark."

"As I made clear, Paul: one job at a time. I'll get right to the point now and I'm again seeking your help. It has to do mainly with our country's ban on embryonic stem cell research." Cassell raised his voice a notch. "And all of *Vérité* is aware of your recent interest in the subject and that you've been writing and lecturing about it. Well, the ban was lifted about a week ago. While you were here—and so preoccupied—I knew it was coming because they told me so, but I didn't know when. Our scientists had done loads of preliminary work pending the possibility of going ahead but held back until the ban was officially lifted."

"Who's 'they'"?

"Various French officials. As you know, we don't work **for** the government, but every so often we're asked to work **with** them. This time it was the new minister of health plus the minister of research. They'll soon ratify a text allowing researchers to import embryonic stem cells. Some projects could get underway within a few months,

but all the work in mice, and hopefully soon in humans––all of it's now at a standstill. Which is a shame. Stem cell research is probably the most important research going on now. All over the world. In spite of religious considerations, there are now definite ways to get around them. We hear about its potential value in helping those with Parkinson's Disease, certain cancers, burns, spinal cord injuries and so on. I attended a lecture recently that influenced me greatly. The lecturer concentrated on people with ailing hearts. He first pointed out what VEGF is. Do you know?"

"Not at all."

"Well, it stands for vascular endothelial growth factor. It promotes blood vessel growth in the heart. And this is just one new example. There'll be more soon, so we've got to get going on this stem cell subject."

"I think the ratification is great, Leon. Congratulations." Paul's voice had taken on a deeper texture. "But where do I fit in?" he asked.

"The preliminary work? Months and months of it? It was all summarized in folders stored in sort of a filing cabinet. No copies had been made. Just the originals were there. Maybe 50 to 70 folders in all. Nothing was stored or even done using computers. They were afraid of cybercrime. They wrote everything down—the old-fashioned way."

"So?"

"So the material has disappeared. Just like that!"

Paul thought he heard Leon's fist pounding near the phone. "The folders?" Paul asked.

"The entire cabinet. It was kept here in Paris and it disappeared the day after the ban was lifted. I'll explain the whole thing when you arrive here."

"Arrive there? Wait a minute. For what, may I ask? I just left there."

"Yes, I know. I also know certain authorities at Yale—your committee of bosses—and I've contacted them."

"You've *what*?" Paul thought he was joking, but at the same time intimated that such a move could jeopardize his new position. "You should have checked with me first," he said, his lips tightening. "After all, I'm not working for you now and honestly, I think your doing that before my approval was an intrusion into my affairs." Paul was serious about what he just said; after all, his new job had just begun.

"Now, now … rest assured that I told them you knew nothing about what I'm about to say. That we could use your services again. I didn't elaborate for them but I'm asking you for the same arrangements as before, including the financials. They're willing to give you up for as long as it takes, especially as voiced by the one who feels that stem cell research is absolutely necessary for all of mankind. And for the record, Paul, I feel the same way, despite my Catholic faith. I've always been for it. And now that the ban's been lifted, we want a piece

of the action, to use an American phrase."

Paul didn't take long to react. He straightened up as if to pounce. "I think I know the answer," he said, his words measured. He tried to sound civil. "But what exactly would you need me for?"

"To find the cabinet and all its contents. Plus one other related thing, but I won't get into it until we sit down and talk."

An empty silence ensued before Paul announced, "You know by now, Leon, that I hate that kind of thing."

"What kind is that?"

"Unexplained silences." Even though Paul tried to smile, his face didn't cooperate.

He surveyed what he could see of his office without swiveling around, for he had stiffened: ceiling-high windows, the antique furniture, the wall of books—some forensic, some mythological—but the majority historical. Finally he said, "You're teasing me by only hinting at a subject." It was just a fleeting thought but, to some degree, he missed his former position as head of Yale's history department, and every time he allowed his eyes to roam over his countless history books, the thought was renewed.

"You mean 'one other thing'?"

Despite the diversion, Paul answered almost before Leon could get the words out. "Precisely," he said.

Leon didn't hesitate either. "I'm sorry but it's so

complicated that, rather than mess it up, I'd prefer to deal with it in person. Please give me that latitude."

A third period of silence preceded what Leon said next: "Tell you what. It has to do with Switzerland and the current troubles with its banking industry."

"Now that makes it all the worse," Paul exclaimed. "Stem cells, missing research, Swiss banking? But I can see where you're coming from: too complicated to get into by phone. You're piquing my interest though."

"Have you been following the Swiss problem?" Leon asked.

"To a degree. Do you think they have anything to do with the missing cabinet?"

"I don't know, but I suppose it's a possibility."

Paul slid back down in his chair and, ostensibly composed, changed the subject: "Now tell me again: the same financial arrangements, the same hotel for me, the same supporting cast—I mean Sylvie and Vincent and Maurice, the military man. Maybe one or two others, like Guy Martin at the *International Herald Tribune*. He knows what's going on just about everywhere because of his contacts. And it's immediate too because it's digital. Not exactly my cup of tea."

"Please!" Leon said. "Let's not get into that. Or maybe we should, so you'll know where I stand on it … or don't. Some days I'm not even sure of what I *don't* know. Can you believe it?"

Despite his modesty, he'd had a distinguished career

in teaching the essentials of French law enforcement. Early on, he worked as a captain for both the police force and the Prefecture of Police in Paris. Ten years later, he taught criminology at their Grandes-Écoles and, at the same time, lectured regularly at the Paris Police Museum. Currently he was teaching a course on Corrections, Crime and Criminology at the Sorbonne. He even graduated from the first class of Yale University's School of Organization and Management. Then too, he maintained an excellent relationship with the British military. So his background was full and varied.

Paul removed a folded year-and-a-half old copy of the *Wall Street Journal* from a bottom desk drawer. "Let me explain, Leon; it'll only take a minute or two. He unfolded the paper before him. "I have a newspaper page spread out here and at least twice a week I read it over. It reminds me of things and also gives me some solace. There's a title at the top and subtitles below it with lines leading to circles with various short warnings, advice and so on written in them. The whole thing was put together by Kara Swisher and Walt Mossberg. Very clever. You willing to listen?"

"Of course. I may end up having you bring along an extra copy for myself."

Paul read the following:

"ALL THINGS DIGITAL
Keep What Works—and Change Everything Else

The key dynamic in the tech industry may not be old vs. new." And the lines lead to seven circles in all. They say:

> There is a fundamental disconnect between the providers of education and the consumers of education.
> Cloud computing was ridiculously hyped and very promising at the same time.
> CFOs see the R & D departments as a black hole.
> In government, it's very difficult to explain the life cycle of a technology project.
> There has to be some mechanism to filter people that are stealing content.
> Privacy policies have to get better. They have to get simpler.
> It's tough to scan through a video and know for sure that it's copyrighted.

"And think of it, Leon. This only applies to the tech industry. Anyway, they end up quoting Apple's legendary Steve Jobs: "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something—your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never

let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life. In other words: no matter what, you always need to look back to look forward'."

"I definitely want a copy of the paper, Paul."

"I'll bring one along. Pretty simple stuff, right?"

"Yes, but right on the money. And you know what else?" Leon said. "We're on the same wavelength."

"Yeah, I knew it from the start. But I think I'm further behind than you."

"I wouldn't bet on it, Paul, but even if so … as Jobs put it … gut, destiny, karma. Throw those into all your successes. I believe you lead the pack. Over anyone. And I'm talking not only about your capabilities in treasure hunting but also your interest in helping humanity as a whole. I think I know more about you than Sylvie does––not physically, of course."

"But, Leon … taking it a step further, what on earth are you driving at?"

"As I said, your helping humanity: quietly helping the downtrodden, your securing them jobs, helping finance the poorest kids so they can become college-bound if they can't get scholarships. Even serving on Yale's Scholarship Committee for Connecticut."

"Hmm, I've probably been kicked off that, too."

"I doubt it. You're too valuable."

"Well thanks for all of that. I don't know who said it first but 'hearing kind words is a terrific validation of my efforts'. We'll see how long they last."

"What? The efforts or the kind words?"

"Both," Paul said.

"I'm sure once you tackle a problem, it gets solved. So there'll always be kind words."

Paul felt elated but didn't let it show, instead switching back to the new assignment. "So my bosses have given me their blessing through you, and I needn't go to them and plead the case of my leaving for there?" He put his hands together in prayer. "I hope it's an okay move. Tell me again it is."

"I assure you that once you find the cabinet—or even if you don't and we mutually agree to terminate the assignment—you'll be back where you are, there at Sterling."

Paul couldn't resist. "You know, Leon," he said firmly, "you could talk a squirrel into . .. oh, never mind ... I'll do it. When do I start?"

"When *can* you?"

"Let's see; it's now Monday here. Plan on my arrival Wednesday morning, your time. I'll call you from the Meridien Montparnasse as soon as I settle in. Would you relay all this to Sylvie?"

"Yes, I will. She was right, you know."

"About what?"

"That you'd accept. And by the way, she went ahead with handing in her resignation at the Academy of Sciences. Too bad in a way. They're losing a productive Harvard grad and the best administrator of its Grant

Proposal Committee."

"Yeah, she phoned me about it yesterday. And when she wants to start here at Yale, three science departments will haggle over which one she should choose."

"For teaching?"

"For some teaching and for becoming an administrator for all three."

"She's that good, Paul. I can vouch for it."

"So can I. As we both know, the Academy we speak of is an integral part of the famous Institute of France. And there, she's headed up probably its most important committee: *Comite Acadametique des Relations Internationales Scientifiques et Techniques.* Did I say it right?"

"Perfect. And you must be told that the Institute considers our organization a rival. Stretching a point, we might say that Sylvie is a spy for us. She attends Academy meetings but not *Vérité* meetings. However, I keep her up to date."

"Good to know this background, Leon. She's hinted about it but never really explained it."

"That's Sylvie for you. She's good at double-dealing, and I say that in the best sense of the word. Just remember though, she's on ***our*** side, not the Academy's."

"Okay now," Paul said, "as long as we're talking personalities, one thing before I forget. Actually two. You remember Sparky, the criminalist at Hollings General, and David Brooks, right?"

"Yes, both of them."

"Well, I'd like to notify them of this new undertaking of mine. They might prove valuable if I were to call them on certain occasions. And I want you to know about it ahead of time. Criminology and law enforcement. Reinforces my efforts, my capabilities, my confidence … whatever."

"If it's what you want and feel you need, go right ahead."

Paul thought back to the time when he began his treasure hunting career, when it included more states than Connecticut. In Rhode Island, for example, he was visiting a doctor friend who was stationed at the U.S. Naval station at Quonset Point and was asked to accompany him on Grand Rounds. At least a dozen nurses and other doctors took part. The doctor introduced Paul as a famous neurosurgeon from Los Angeles.

"Your operations must take brains," a nurse commented.

Paul couldn't think of an appropriate response but, poker-faced, asked, "You mean mine or the person whose skull I'm opening?"

All tried to control their chuckles. Somehow, it reminded him of Sylvie's earlier laughter.

Later at his pre-Victorian home, walking distance from the library, Paul sorted through some of the papers

about the Scent of Danger and Napoleon cases he hadn't yet removed from a suitcase. He came across a copy of the initial email from Leon Cassell months before and decided to skim through it to refresh his memory. Besides, it had always been his habit to read something before dinner. He now wondered whether or not that would continue once Sylvie moved in with him.

He began reading the email, wine glass filled to the top, slouched in his favorite living room chair, a Biedermeier dating back to the early 1800s and given to him for treasure hunting in Vienna. Other rare pieces surrounded him, all gifts in addition to fees for his worldwide art recovery efforts: primarily Hepplewhites, Chippendales, and Duncan Phyfes in the Sheraton and Directoire styles. His favorite though was a 10-foot long sofa, upholstered in hand-distressed vintage cigar leather, and accented with brass studs and button tufting. He was quick to point out to visitors that while the sofa didn't reek of cigars, he could tell any piece's approximate age by its smell, not altogether unpleasant to him and undetectable to them. There were also several rolled arm chairs in the large room, each a different but compatible color, even to the standout cranberry red one.

At first, Paul skipped over random sections of the email but then chose to read it in its entirety, for he soon found Cassell's words as captivating as when he'd read them months before:

Dear Dr. Paul D'Arneau:

I represent the executive committee of *Gens de Vérité*, an organization in France that has been in existence since the fall of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1815. We are a private group that has never been part of the French government.

You undoubtedly know that there are many theories about the emperor's death. Was it natural or was he murdered?

I hope you don't take it as an intrusion in your private affairs, but we are aware of your international reputation as a scholar on the History of the Early Modern Era and of your unfortunate Yale University demotion for reasons that do not concern us.

Paul could feel his craggy face turn blotchy, yet he brandished a smile that overtook the margins of a square jaw. For the details of his quarrel with Yale were ancient history in his mind, and he no longer became upset when thinking about their charge that he had become a "regressive mythologist." It took awhile but he now handled any recurrent thoughts about the subject with ease. A mythologist? Yes, to a degree. Regressive? No.

He returned to the email:

But what does concern us is your extensive detection work in matters historical. Your two Interpol contacts at the recent symposium in Lyon on *The Theft and Illicit Traffic in Works of Art and the Spoils of War* speak highly of you. They attended your lecture and still comment on your ability to have combined the responsibilities of heading up the history department at a major university with those that must be involved in helping recover historic and priceless artworks. We are also impressed with your rescue of that stolen vessel in Kuala Lumpur.

Now to the reason for this message. We wish to hire you to investigate the death of the emperor. Murder or natural death? It is, to be sure, the coldest of cold cases. We are prepared to offer you six-figure compensation. Also, all paid expenses including travel, wherever it takes you. Lodging and all other necessities in France or elsewhere would be high quality. Personal security would be provided, should that be required.

If you reach conclusions about the death with satisfactory documentation and evidence, we will add a bonus of one

million U.S. dollars. So to be clear, Dr. D'Arneau: this sum would be in addition to the base compensation. If you are unable to arrive at a satisfactory solution, base compensation would be yours to keep. What is it you Americans say: win-win?

If you are interested, we will send a four-person delegation to meet with you in the United States to work out specific details. They are distinguished members of *Vérité*: our secretary who is a military expert; an academic historian who, if you wish, could work with you full-time while you are in Paris or beyond; a scientist; and myself. My background is in teaching and law enforcement.

Final points: (1) Since three of us received undergraduate and post-graduate training in your country (Boston and New Haven), and the fourth taught there, each of us speaks fluent English, (we even use your idioms!); (2) During any stays in France we would be available for consultation, day or night. We are in a position to open many doors for you; (3) If you do accept our offer, we ask that you temporarily not mention this communication to anyone except those you trust with your life. You

might decide to refuse our offer and then inform others about it. We have discussed this possibility and determined that there would be no damage done to our cause, for we only seek the truth.

I ask the favor of an email reply within 72 hours.

Leon Cassell, Chairman
Gens de Vérité

Simply reading the copy energized Paul to an extent he hadn't expected. It also put an end to what he believed to be leftover exhaustion from the last case with Leon. He now believed that such a feeling was really disguised boredom, for nothing in the last three weeks could begin to compare with the excitement of his Scent of Danger challenge. He slapped his knee with the palm of his hand— nearly dropping the wine glass—and let out a thunderous "Yes". Eager to begin yet another adventure with *Gens de Vérité*, he could hardly wait to meet with its chairman in Paris.

Before the night was over, however, he wanted to brush up on stem cells and especially the banking crisis in Switzerland. He had a superficial knowledge of the crisis—whatever he'd read in newspapers over the last few years— but that was hardly enough for the task ahead. He put together a meager dinner, his ultra-portable laptop computer nearby as usual. Rushing through the meal,

he slid the dishes and utensils aside with one hand and with the other, pulled over the laptop and downloaded all the articles available on both. He wrote the word "KEY" atop "STEM CELLS" and stuffed the rest into his briefcase for later review. He read the "KEY" one slowly as if memorizing it

STEM CELLS

Stem cells are the body's "mechanics", repairing damaged tissues and organs. Because these cells are able to grow into any type of cell in the body, scientists believe they hold the key to groundbreaking new therapies—in Lou Gehrig's disease, in Parkinson's disease, in pancreatic diseases, certain eye diseases, lymphomas, heart diseases, and others. In fact, you name the malady or organ and it's either being treated or studied with stem cells in mind.

What are the sources for stem cells? They are obtained

(1) from embryos—that is, from fertilized egg cells left over from in-vitro fertilization. This is what has caused so much controversy of an ethical and religious nature.

(2) from adult tissues. For example, bone marrow.
(3) from cloned adult cells. Recall that Dolly the sheep, was cloned several years ago.
(4) pluripotent stem cells (IPS for short). Described below.

Another way of looking at stem cells is in explaining that they are non-specialized cells that have the capacity to self-renew and to differentiate into more mature cells. And "differentiate" means to acquire the features of specific cells such as heart, liver, pancreatic or muscle cells. Thus, they are the ancestral cells of all mature cells in the body.

Regarding the IPS cells, several research groups have discovered ways to tinker—genetically—with adult cells so they look and behave like stem cells left over from embryos discarded after in-vitro fertilization. This eliminates the much-discussed opposition from religious groups because true embryos are not involved. The bottom line is that there have been many steps forward involving stem cell therapy's leaving the lab and entering

> the clinic. So many steps, in fact, that by the time one has read this summary, new approaches, discoveries, and applications will most likely exist.

Regarding banking in Switzerland, he knew that currently about one-third of all worldwide funds held outside their country of origin ("offshore" funds) were kept there. Even the Nazi who reportedly stole assets from the Jewish people during the Second World War managed to deposit them in Swiss banks.

And he also knew the climate had changed. That in the space of just a few years, action by European governments, international arrest warrants and, particularly, investigations by the United States, had turned its banking secrecy into a major liability. Now, tax fraud and tax evasion had taken center stage and many Swiss bank directors were unable to leave their country for fear of being arrested.

Since the phone call, Paul was perplexed by a certain question: As an alternative, why didn't Leon offer to have a *Gens de Vérité* delegation meet with him in the U.S. as before? A tepid answer was that it would be easier to have a joint meeting with Sylvie, Vincent and Leon and separate ones, if need be, that could follow on their own turf.

He was all but certain that the challenges ahead would constitute the most acute of his career. And also the

most dangerous because so many countries were involved in stem cell research and in Switzerland's being such a safe financial hideaway for many of them. Exactly how science in general and medicine in particular intertwined with Swiss's ancient banking secrecies would head the list of topics needing clarification.

Early the next morning, Paul called Walter Sparks, the Hollings Police Department's criminalist.

"Sparky?"

"Hi, Paul. What we got?"

"How do you know we got anything?"

"That's the only time you call … no, I'm only kidding. What's up?"

Paul couldn't let it go. "Wait now. I called you for my nephew's birthday party a few months back, didn't I?"

"Sure, and a box of chocolates."

Paul finally said, "Seriously though, Sparky, if I'm overseas, may I call if there's a forensic issue that's stymieing me?"

"Overseas? What's going on?"

Paul began to give the barest essentials of his new undertaking and asked if he could drop by the lab within the next 20 minutes to amplify. He also stated he'd be contacting David Brooks to request the same availability.

"Are you sure this wouldn't be an imposition? Maybe I'd have to call you both. Maybe not. Depends

on what I'd be facing."

"Absolutely fine. Now you've got my curiosity buds bristling."

Ten minutes later, Paul pulled into the department's partially new addition, one that for years had a rotting entranceway and now was done over, as were the department's crumbling outer walls of blanched brick and pitted mortar. The rest of the building, including the laboratory at its innermost section, remained the same. He exchanged greetings with friends at the dispatch window. One announced his arrival as a subdued public address message and he was buzzed into a maze of hallways and interconnecting rooms, each filled with employees working hard and fast. He couldn't tell if his sudden presence brought on some of the action.

Ambling through, steam radiators banged out their familiar but not offensive odor and the floor creaked beneath half partitions and shiny modular furniture as employees traipsed about their filing cabinets and worked their computers. Paul proceeded directly to the crime lab, past benches of microscopes, chemical bottles, latent fingerprint equipment, piles of wire baskets, swirls of glass tubing, and the brothy smell of petri dishes. He entered the criminalist's corner office without knocking.

Sparky, wearing plastic gloves, sat at a large desk inspecting a handgun with a hand-held microscope. A lamp dangled on a cord from the ceiling above the desk. Its green metal shade matched Sparky's visor.

He rose and they shook hands as if they were long-lost brothers.

Paul always thought the criminalist was a forty-some-odd throwback to a Western Union clerk in a 1940s B movie: slicked down black hair parted in the middle, wire-framed glasses, gartered shirtsleeves, faded white suspenders.

"*Gens de Vérité* has a new assignment for me, as I started to say before, and I'm here to ask if I may phone you, if necessary, from different parts of the world—most likely Europe or Asia. The calls would deal with forensic matters." He didn't wait for a reply as if to indicate he was either in a hurry or wanted to get everything in before forgetting an important point. He knew that Sparky was used to this. And Sparky waited for a time to intervene.

"If you agree, I'll have the equivalent of the highest powered forensic lab there is, whether in …"

The criminalist interrupted. "Oh, come on now," he said.

"No, I mean it, Sparky. I'm talking Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Japan, Argentina … you name it."

"Well, thank you, but why would you call? I suppose it's if you're faced with a forensic toughie?"

"On the button. Let's hope I don't have to, but I thought it best to alert you in advance. So it's okay?"

"One hundred percent okay. And at any time. But may I give you one piece of advice ahead of time?"

"I'd appreciate it."

"Michelangelo once said, 'Trifles make perfection--and perfection is no trifle'. I think that's sound advice. For example, a police inspector once dropped by here and handed me a bag containing some soil and debris. I held the bag up to the light and immediately told him that the suspect he'd called me about was no doubt lying. The few insects in the debris gave it all away.

"Without going into detail, they revealed that the murder victim's body had been moved from one particular spot under his house to the living room in the same house. It was something the suspect had denied. As they say, 'It's easy to trivialize trifles', but so often in forensics as in most other endeavors, it's the minute little details—a scratch here, a scratch there, an insect here, an insect there—that are the most revealing."

Paul appreciated Sparky's words even though he was well acquainted with what the criminalist was driving at.

Yet, he wanted Sparky to go on. He did, but only to say, "I hope I haven't bored you with this, Paul, but just remember, don't be afraid to prolong a forensic-type visit by neglecting details. That's where they say the Devil resides. And remember, call me at any time if you think you need help."

# Chapter 2

Paul managed to nap a good part of the way on the flight to Paris, his mind settled but determined. He was wearing his favorite autumn traveling clothes: striped yellow shirt, no tie, white windbreaker, khaki pants, tan loafers.

The taxi ride from Charles de Gaulle Airport to the Meridien Montparnasse Hotel was somewhat unsettling. Determination remained but he suddenly harked back to his Napoleon investigation and the memory of a black Citroen tailing him nearly the entire route—along the Avenue de le Grande Armée, past the Arc de Triomphe, beyond the Champs Élysées and the Hotel des Invalides. There was no Citroen this time, yet the anxiety of that twenty-mile ride seemed to pop up despite the successful outcome of the case. Was the emotion based

on that tailgating memory or on the upcoming case? In this connection, he couldn't help but wonder if anyone besides the *Vérité* group was aware of his Parisian return. He doubted it but Paul was always plagued with the individual anxieties of previous cases. Each seemed to attach itself to the existing batch, even before a new investigation got fully underway, and this stem cell one was no exception. By the time they reached the hotel, however, he effortlessly called upon his favorite mantra: *Deep thoughts of the future ensure that what's past is past.*

As expected, in the three weeks since Paul had stayed at the hotel, no changes had occurred there. The lobby décor was still in pastels; mirrors and glass spanned the walls; bronze statues of war heroes occupied every corner; and background music was mostly from America's Broadway.

It was 11:00 a.m., Paris time, when he arrived carrying a single piece of luggage, his trusty laptop with its worn leather casing, and a satchel bulging with reams of paper, documents, various over-the-counter medications and a portable handheld digital recording device. Important conversations and reminders were kept stored in the device, leaving room for others if they ever needed recording.

After exchanging fresh greetings with a familiar face at the reservation desk and checking in, he hurried to his 12th floor room, the same one he'd had before.

Clean smelling and serviceable, he'd requested it and it was available. He immediately phoned Leon Cassell and a meeting was scheduled for 4:30 at Paul's favorite Parisian restaurant, the Brasserie Lipp. Leon would arrange for Sylvie and Vincent to join them at a reserved table in the outer section of the restaurant.

Two years earlier, having worked for *Vérité* on the reason why Napoleon had died and then having written a book about it, Paul had met with Leon almost daily at the Lipp. He took the book along with him during every case ever since, for it contained, in addition to the facts of that case, many essentials of a forensic nature. He wasn't totally sure whether or not a forensic review would be necessary in locating the container of folders, but he rummaged through his luggage, found the book and read through the section titled *The Brasserie Lipp* featuring Ernest Hemingway. It wasn't the first time he had done so at the start of a case. Nor had he ever gone so far as to imagine himself in the same league as Hemingway, but frequenting a place where the famous author "hung out and wrote" boosted his confidence. He read the following:

> The Brasserie Lipp hadn't changed much since Paul was there last, nor much perhaps since it opened in the late 1800s during the Franco-Prussian War. It had grown to be known among the 12,000 cafés

in Paris as the best literary meeting place, having won the Legion of Honor in 1958, commemorating that distinction. Many thought that if there had been an award for the best beer, sausage and sauerkraut, the Lipp would have easily won it.

To this day, some still argue, tongue-in-cheek, whether or not the giant publishers Gallimard, Grasset and Hachette Livres settled nearby because of the literary intellectuals who frequented the area. It was in fact one of the reasons why Paul had spent most of his "leisure" time there while in the throes of compiling material for his most recent book, and even writing parts of it, just as Hemingway had turned the same terraced haunt into a place for work. Such a public relations coup was never lost on its proprietors who accepted, even encouraged, the café's nickname: Hemingway Place.

Paul had read the plaque displayed under the awning the last time 18 months ago, when *St. Helena: Napoleon's Final Defeat* was in its infancy. And now, while waiting, he shielded one eye against the last traces of the fading sun and read it again, taking more pains to digest every word. It was written in both French and English.

ON THIS SPOT, ERNEST HEMINGWAY WROTE:

> *The beer was very cold and wonderful to drink. The pommes a l'huile were firm and marinated and the olive oil delicious. I ground black pepper over the potatoes and moistened the bread in the olive oil. After the first heavy draft of beer, I drank and ate very slowly. When the pommes a l'huile were gone, I ordered another serving of cervelas. This was a sausage like a heavy, wide frankfurter split in two and covered with a special mustard sauce. I mopped up all the oil and all the sauce with bread and drank the beer slowly until it began to lose its coldness. I finished it and ordered a demi ...*

After showering and shaving, Paul had left for the Lipp earlier than necessary in order to take in its ambience and read the plaque under its outside awning once again. Even to take in the faint mustard and onion aromas that greeted patrons before they entered the main café. This time Vera Lynn rather than the usual Edith Piaf music filled the air. He sat in one of four chairs surrounding a small round table beneath the awning, the table with Leon's name prominently displayed on a cardboard

marker—indicating he had reserved it—and the only unoccupied one among ten to twelve other tables. Paul felt cramped while he sat there waiting for the others to arrive. It had been only three weeks since he last dealt with any of the *Vérité* contingent, yet he occupied his time by picturing the three he was about to meet again: Leon, the chairman, stooped but tall—a towering three-hundred pounder in his mid-sixties who reminded him of Jackie Gleason; Vincent, a teacher at the Sorbonne—a complete opposite in size and shape, an arresting young man who had personally assisted Paul in several life-and-death situations during the previous two cases; and Sylvie, the one Paul had intentions of eventually marrying but who would be living with him for a spell before that. She, like Paul, was forty-six.

It didn't take long before the three walked in. Paul stood to shake the men's hands—vigorously as if they hadn't seen each other in years. They were more formally dressed than Paul: each with a gray suit, blue shirt and a solid rust tie. Paul vaguely remembered Vincent's always checking with Leon on what to wear before important engagements. Paul himself wore a blue blazer, blue shirt with open collar and gray slacks.

Sylvie spoke briefly with acquaintances at a nearby table, then marched up to Paul and stretched up to throw her arms around him, her punishing smile taking shape slowly. As if he were seeing her for the first time, he backed an arm's length away, saying, "Ah, yes: petite

and shapely."

"Don't embarrass me," she said, straightening some strands of straight raven hair. Used to her glittering green eyes, he was no less drawn to them, gently kissing them whenever they embraced.

"The pretty one at last," was all Paul could think of saying. She was dressed in a chunky green sweater, black leather miniskirt, tan LeChaneau boots that reached to her knees, and a carmel silk scarf that was wrapped loosely around her head and knotted in the back. If Leon reminded Paul of Jackie Gleason, Sylvie's scarf reminded him of Audrey Hepburn.

"What?" Leon said, "I'm not pretty?" In exaggeration, he turned his head sideways, both left and right, displaying a hawk nose, thinning hair and a wispy white mustache that clashed with yellow-shaded teeth. The yellow was just a shade lighter than the rims of his eyeglasses. A lit cigarette dangled from his lower lip, just as the glasses dangled on a black cord from around his neck.

"They hang in symmetry," Paul commented.

"What do?"

"The cigarette and the glasses."

Leon laughed his mouth empty of smoke but Vincent's laugh was the loudest, drawing the attention of those nearby. He was the first to sit and he folded his hands neatly before him. The others followed suit. Evidently Vincent thought it best to counter with something more

serious, for he leaned closer to Paul and whispered, "As usual, I have your guns and some ammo right here." He placed what looked like a shoebox on the table and slid it toward Paul, who looked around first, then casually placed it on his lap where he opened it. He removed a holstered Beretta Cougar .45, an ankle rig containing a Heritage Stealth 9 mm pistol, and an extra six-round cartridge. He returned the empty box to Vincent, leaned down as if tying a shoe, applied the rig to the inside of his left ankle, then slid the extra ammo and .45 into his jacket pocket. He would slip his shoulder into the holster later on—when he was alone.

Paul whispered back, "Thanks. You'd think I'd have some kind of dispensation on airplanes, doing what I do for a living."

Leon, who could hear the whispering, crushed his cigarette in an ashtray and countered with, "But crooks do their thing for a living, too."

Paul ignored the remark but addressed Vincent again. "If I think it's necessary, you'll accompany me as before?"

"Whenever and wherever," Vincent answered enthusiastically. "The Sorbonne will understand."

After Leon indicated to a waiter that they'd be having dinner following what might be a lengthy discussion there under the awning, all four agreed not to have a drink until later. He stared at Paul. "Now to get down to business …" he began.

"Wait," Paul interrupted. "The container filled with folders? That's what I want to hear about first. How big is it?"

"Ok, we'll start there. I'm told it's wooden, about one foot square, three feet high and is on rollers. Let's see ..." Leon scratched his head. "Got a lid and is usually kept locked. Who's got the key? I'm not sure. Thick folders are just stacked in there and, as you can imagine, the thing's very heavy. Would take two people to lift it."

"Good enough," Paul said. "I mean about the description. But if it takes two people to lift it, who's to say there aren't more than that involved? I mean in the disappearance." Paul asked the question as if he were getting cold feet and such a possibility wasn't lost on the other three.

But Leon's response was rapid, as if it had to be. In fact, as if he were ready for any resistance on Paul's part. "I'm sure there **are** more people," he said. "Who knows? Maybe even a whole country may be involved." He let his last statement percolate, all the while never taking his eyes off Paul.

"You're not backing out, are you?" Sylvie asked.

Her question reminded Paul of the time she'd asked him about her new apartment and if he'd help in its makeup. He agreed at first, then one night suddenly announced he was backing out of "a man's advice".

"That's for *you* to decide, not me," he'd said.

In fact, he'd written about it in his latest book and

remembered every word, more or less:

> "It turned out that Sylvie's apartment was not really that ... situated on an avenue between Champs-Élysées and the Eiffel Tower ... it was one in a string of four folk-Victorian structures with only an alleyway separating them. I would have classified them as single-story town houses had they been connected ... inside the living and dining areas were contained within an open space. I think ...and a narrow kitchen was at its center. Overall, the design was varied. The furniture pieces were formal ... while all hardware was distinctly decorative. With Sylvie's lone input ... I'm told ... there were paintings with ornate frames, fantasy mirrors ... and chandeliers suspended from high-beamed ceilings. Waist-high cherry cabinets rimmed three walls and had on them fresh flowers, fine china and linen, sparkling silverware ... and a bottle of cognac on a silver platter."

"No, not at all," Paul said. "It's just that I often get added insights by acting this way, playing devil's advocate. For example, I can make a case by saying I

only locate stolen treasures—things finite. I realize the cabinet is finite but if a country or countries are somehow involved, then that's a different story."

Again, Leon seemed prepared. "But the advice you gave David Brooks last time around didn't involve just finite things. We feel you can help in other ways here, too."

"What other ways?"

"Who's involved? What's their next move? I can safely say France wouldn't steal its own possession. It lifted its ban on stem cell research and if the Swiss want to switch some of their so-called secret funds to finance that kind of research, France wants to be at least one of the recipients."

Paul didn't want to belabor the point but felt obligated to get in what he thought could be the last word on the subject by saying, "Yeah, that I know, but I'd be going from the scientific to the financial, if not the political."

It was *not* the last word. Leon retaliated: "Most important ventures have their financial and political components. And how can anyone criticize this … no, not 'this' but 'our' … venture? It holds such promise for citizens of **any** country, Paul."

"Which ones are on the top of your list?" Paul asked.

"Germany, Spain, Argentina, Switzerland itself. Yours, obviously. Mine, I hope."

"And you're saying that they would benefit by having the French folders." It was more of a statement than a question.

"Yes they would," Leon said. "The findings that French scientists put together would represent that much less those other countries would have to do. At least I think that's the way it works. And I do know France worked very hard on all this. Actually, I've been told by several reliable sources that possibly with exception of your country, our scientists have provided more material about stem cells than any of the countries I mentioned. There are things the others hardly address at all."

As usual, whenever Leon got serious, a card showed up in his hand. He referred to one that was loaded with scribbles.

"For example," he said, "they don't write much about how alcohol—I mean binge-drinking—can affect certain people by destroying important stem cells in their brains. Or about embryonic stem cells being rejected by a person's immune system. Those kinds of things. But we do. I mean France does."

"You mentioned my country, Paul. Let me elaborate on our progress. We're at the stage now where our researchers are implanting pig material into patients with leg injuries. As a result, the patients' own stem cells are stimulated into regenerating new muscle. And I'm not talking minor leg injuries. These are severe—from car crashes to bomb blasts, for example. It's really

interesting. Cells are removed from the tissue of pigs and what remains is what they refer to as connective scaffolding. Without cells, an immune system doesn't reject it. Then they implant material that's called something like 'extracellular matrix'. The matrix fills in the injury and while that's going on, the pig scaffolding degrades, releasing chemical signals that attract stem cells to the site. Sorry to get so technical, folks, but the subject came up and I happened to read about it just the other day."

"Impressive," Sylvie chimed in. "I'll bet though that there's duplication after duplication in the other countries."

Paul, impressed, responded, "You're the scientist, my love, but I would wager that duplication has its merits."

"Anyway," he went on, "I would think I'd have to visit each of those countries. Are you game, Vincent?"

"Yes, sir."

"Leon?" Paul said.

"Sir? I mean 'yes?'"

"I noticed you listed Germany first. Any reason?"

"Just that I can't separate the Nazi issue from any of this—nor will I ever. The Holocaust and all it entailed. I'm sure you know that the Nazis collected Jewish assets—money, jewelry, even gold fillings—and worked deals with Switzerland. In other words, hid the stuff with the Swiss. There may still be some there now." Leon's

face took on a granite hardness. "And in the process," he continued, "Paris was discredited during all the deciphering going on. But the discrediting should have been confined to Vichy France. You've heard of that, I'm sure."

Paul nodded.

"Well, let me give you a brief account of what was going on in those days. I was in grade school at the time, but my parents kept me informed. In June of 1940, the German army occupied Paris and Henri-Philippe Petain became France's new premier. He worked very closely with Adolph Hitler. In effect, they divided the whole country into occupied and unoccupied zones. The Germans controlled three-fifths of the country, an area that included the northern and western regions and the whole Atlantic coast. The rest of the country was left for Petain to administer and it became known as Vichy France. It really amounted to a puppet state of the country. One aspect of this whole damn scenario is that all Jews living in any part of France had to surrender to the Germans. This meant that Petain had to help round up as many Jews as possible with all of them headed for concentration camps and eventual extermination. There was even some talk about Hitler and his German associates wanting to create a master race that would comprise the whole world. Even now, it's rumored that Germany is working on stem cells not only for young people but also for adults in order to create such a race. They've wanted to proceed with this

from early on but they've been distracted by outsiders continuing to investigate the Jewish issue and possibly the related gold issue during World War II."

Leon stopped abruptly as though it were too difficult to continue to keep his emotions in check.

Sylvie sensed it and was compelled to add, "I couldn't have said it any better."

Paul remained silent and concentrated hard.

Leon, quickly more composed, asked him, "Would you like to hear my mother's maiden name?" Not waiting for an answer, he said, "Glutsberg."

None of the other three managed a comment and finally Leon said, "Both personally and as chairman of *Vérité*, I'm more interested in the Vichy France and Switzerland connections—more than in the stem cell issue per se. But if we don't find the stem cell cabinet—should we call it SCC?—then we, I mean what was never part of Vichy France, aren't even in the picture.

"So my guess, Paul, and that's all it is—a guess–is that the foreign depositor of the most secret assets may be the key. Perhaps it intends to use the contents of SCC as ransom. What am I suggesting? Just this: it's been widely circulated in the world-wide media that France has just lifted its ban on embryonic stem cell research; that about 2,000 French millionaires currently live in Switzerland; and that they, especially with pressure from your country, the U.S. of A, will not only be identified but will have to pay all sorts of taxes. In fact, I have

proof that many Swiss bank directors are unable to leave the country because they fear being arrested."

Except for the subject of Vichy France, Paul clearly remembered reading about what Leon was talking about but didn't let on.

"I'll wind up," Leon said, "by indicating your country is demanding that not only the long-standing Swiss secrecy of new deposits be stopped and old ones identified, but also that the names of those making withdrawals be revealed. In that way, possibly the identity of existing Nazis or their families might come to light. Especially those now living in Argentina.

"And my last comment is that already one Swiss bank has failed and most likely others will follow. Some not only because of financial reasons but because the officers want to divorce themselves from the whole scene, fearing some sort of penalty, even imprisonment."

Each of them seemed out of breath and agreed to go in, have a drink and eat. As Paul slid his right leg away from his chair, he whispered, "Hello—what do we have here?" His leg rubbed against an object attached to the under surface of the table. He grabbed it and yanked it out for all to see.

"Well, I'll be … I've used these myself in some of my surveillance work."

"What is it?" Vincent asked.

"It's an electronic listening device!" Paul exclaimed.

# Chapter 3

There had been some discussion about consulting with the restaurant's proprietor regarding the device but it was unanimously voted down. The consensus was that nothing really secret had been discussed other than Paul's being hired to find the SCC, but that wouldn't remain a secret for very long. Since he had become an international treasure hunter and also an historian, it didn't take long for his presence in a country to be recognized by a significant few. The historian part involved only other historians. And other than Leon's encouraging Paul to attend an upcoming forum in Seville about stem cell research, not much more information had been exchanged.

Leon had chosen his words carefully: "You know the task at hand; you know your business well; and all I want to say is that over 20 nations will be

represented there."

"We'll see," Paul said, between two bites of a roll.

"And Sylvie?" he continued. "When will you be coming to your new job, to a new country, and most of all, to live with me?"

She took a bite of a roll and said, "We'll see." And, with a flourish, took a second bite.

They all laughed, Vincent again the loudest.

"No, seriously," Sylvie said. "I still have some things to tend to at the Academy and then I'm free to leave. Who knows? I may even leave here when you do. Depends on how you're coming along."

Paul responded immediately: "I'm already planning to visit a few countries and I hope you and Vincent can accompany me to some of them."

"You can count on me," Vincent said.

Sylvie groaned, said nothing articulate, but put a hand on her head and smoothed her hair away from its part.

"Care to reveal the countries?" Leon inquired.

Paul bent over to run his hand along the undersurface of their table while asking the others to do the same. They agreed there was no obvious device under any side.

He then said softly, "Maybe Switzerland, Argentina, Spain, Germany. And possibly Japan. I've always found that direct, eye-to-eye contact far outweighs phone calls. And, of course, I'll have the benefit of the historians. But first I'll check around here first—right here in France.

And it all depends."

Leon's vacant look revealed, "On what?"

"On what I find in the previous country. Naturally. France would seal the deal, as they say."

Paul glanced at Sylvie and said, "We'll explain 'histarians' in a minute, Syl. I'm not talking 'historians'."

Leon emphasized: "You listed some of the European Union. Plus Argentina and Japan."

"Correct. Whatever's necessary."

"And don't forget, Paul, that you'll have the R.A.F. at your disposal. We continue to do mutual favors. They fly out of London's Brise Norton Airbase and would take you anywhere in the world. All I do is call and they have a plane ready immediately."

"Thanks. I'll definitely need them again."

There followed a long speechless interval during which each picked at the served meals, their faces holding no particular expression until Leon, the first to finish, asked, "May I inquire why all the traveling—since I know you're lukewarm about it?"

"Certainly. It's primarily to contact my contacts, as it were. I have them scattered around and they'd be of great help in locating a heavy cabinet that may be out of place somewhere."

"And it's contents," Leon was quick to point out.

"And its contents. But I must ask: what if some contents are missing? Like one of the studies and its

conclusions? How is either one of us to know?"

Leon smiled, his lips curved, confident. "I was told that each study had references to the others."

"Come to think of it," Paul said, "if one is missing, that might be significant."

"How's that?"

"Because its author might hold a clue or two."

Leon flashed a superior grin before saying, "Paul, I didn't comment a while ago but when you mentioned your scattered contacts, you meant the histarians. Thank goodness you eventually became one of them. 'Histarian', not 'historian'."

"Yeah, and I'm glad I did because they've become invaluable to me in the work I do. Wish I didn't resist for so long. They've become my eyes and ears in distant places … all over the world."

"And you're convinced they're trustworthy?"

"Totally. And, for the record, they're the contacts I spoke of before."

Sylvie, admitting she was the least familiar with them and how they operated, asked for the clarification Paul had referred to before.

Paul and Leon eyed one another as if inquiring who should proceed. Leon went ahead, first withdrawing a book from a withered briefcase he'd brought along.

"Ah … same old trove," Paul said.

"Indeed. My second brain. I'll be more accurate if I read from this rather than wringing it," he explained.

Paul, steely attentive, said, "That's 'winging', not 'wringing'. I believe it's an American idiom, isn't it?"

Leon, unperturbed, replied, "Yes, but either would apply actually. In fact, I'll consult this book of mine and wring out what I can about histarians."

There followed what Paul had once tabbed a typical Cassell account of a particular subject. **Any** subject, in fact. Leon flipped through the pages and read loud enough for only their table to hear:

> Histarians are individuals located in practically every region of the civilized world and can provide information that cannot be retrieved any other way … very few people know of their existence. They give out facts only to other histarians or to those who come highly recommended … very often they provide insights that are contrary to what history has recorded so they are appropriately named. Not "contrarians" but "histarians." And most of them like to remain anonymous. They never offer a definitive opinion without first checking with others of their kind … they are constantly doing so … that is, checking or verifying … in addition to delving into things with their own critical eye.

> Some claim they have mystical powers but they have nothing of the sort … they simply do exhaustive research … "private collections from private collectors" they call it. Their information sources are never revealed but their conclusions always turn out to be right. It's superfluous to say … but totally right and totally accurate.
>
> They have sort of a code they live by … "canon" might be a better word: "Never give out information unless you'd die over its accuracy." So they rely on solid facts, not on opinion … although sometimes they will express an opinion supported by the same opinion of other histarians, usually more than three or four. Four is the general rule.
>
> Finally, they all have sworn never to give out much by telephone or over the Internet … only in person.

Assured that Leon was finished, Paul said, "Incidentally, I talked of my contacts before but that 'only in person' is one of the main reasons for my extensive travels."

As it turned out, he wasn't totally aware of the details but he appeared to be a "partial" exception: he

was able to speak to them by phone as long as nothing "monumental" was discussed. Although, with time, both he and they learned how to disguise their topics.

It all stemmed from the many years that worldwide histarians kept enticing him into joining their ranks but, like Pinocchio's Geppetto, he lied about reasons why he shouldn't. But he finally succumbed to them, one by one, group by group, nation by nation.

Sylvie stated she was satisfied with Leon's effort to summarize and was happy that Paul, after long reluctance in becoming one of "them", ultimately had become one.

"But Leon, I have one question to ask," she said. "Vincent here … and I are not histarians and you said they insist on being anonymous."

Leon's words kept pace with a stroking finger: "First, you're both highly recommended and, second, I said "most of them." But let me add a third: "Who's to know I summarized? That's all I did, really. I didn't give out any substantive information. And besides, if and when I do … more likely 'when' … who's to know? We can justify it to ourselves by realizing we're a team … and that's exactly how I feel."

"Amen," Paul said.

"Now getting back to that Seville forum," Leon said, "you'll be attending, I hope … starts the day after tomorrow, Friday, one-thirty."

"That soon?" Paul said, his shoulders drooping. He

didn't wait for an answer. "I think I'd better, but first I'm giving my pal and confidant a call. Dr. David Brooks."

"Ah ... David. Haven't heard from him in some time."

Paul took out his Android smartphone while saying, "I hope this thing works from here." He dialed David's cell phone number. The connection was swifter than expected.

"David, old buddy! How are things going in the political and medical fields?"

"Paul! This magic instrument of mine tells me you're calling from Paris. Another *Vérité* mission?"

"You got it. Listen ... just a simple question."

The question wasn't immediately asked as they plunged right into a discussion of their many past challenges. Over the years, they had worked in tandem on scores of domestic and international cases. And David had become more involved as a member of the Beardsley Zoo Board in nearby Bridgeport. He was its chairman at one time but relinquished it because of increased investigative responsibilities. But he always maintained the same level of concern over the plight of animals, both wild and tame.

Finally Paul, peering over at Leon, asked David about the wisdom of attending the forum.

"Funny you should bring it up," David said. "Since our Hollings Hospital has become more of a research center, the new head of one of our divisions, Dr. Albert

Kesler—originally from Germany—is attending the forum there. In fact, he'll be lecturing on one of his projects."

"What's he heading up at Hollings?"

"The Division of Stem Cell Research. He's been a leading proponent of embryonic stem cell use for years now. In fact he writes a monthly newsletter titled *Stem Cell Review*. It's very popular throughout Europe and South America."

Paul almost gagged over the coincidence before the two of them agreed that David would arrange a meeting between Kesler and Paul at a specific time in the main auditorium of the historic Universidad de Sevilla. The forum was to be held there.

Like a movie-making prompt, three of the four checked their watches. The other—Leon—declared they had had enough for one night and suggested they disband. He complained that they hadn't spent much time on the Vichy France–Swiss connection.

But Paul reminded him that inroads were being made regarding Swiss financial secrecy in general and, as a result, Nazis and their effect on Jews. He stressed the point that he was referring not only to the past but even to present day Nazis and/or their families.

"Many Nazis fled to Argentina and are still living there," he said. "That's why Buenos Aires is high on my list of investigations."

"To visit there or to seek out histarian consults?"

Vincent asked.

"Both."

As they rose to leave, Sylvie chipped in with, first, a remark: "I still remember the Japanese element that wanted—and probably still does—to end the world either with sarin nerve gas or inhaled arsenic." She was referring to the 1995 release of sarin in the Tokyo subways, when 12 commuters had lost their lives. Then the question that momentarily froze the other three: "You think the Japanese and Germans are cavorting?"

Paul had been leading the way to the cashier's counter. He paused, turned, then said, hesitantly, "Just the opposite."

"How so?" Leon asked.

"Not sure yet, but either over creating that master German race or destroying the world one way or another. I'd hate to listen in on their discussions."

"Hold on now, folks," Leon said. "This needs some explaining. Sarin gas? Inhaled arsenic? Refresh my memory."

Paul removed the recorder from his satchel. "Look," he said, "I knew this would come up sooner or later. I recorded two versions of what we're talking about … of what two people explained to me. Let's just sit here and listen: an explanation for you, Leon and a review for the rest of us. Not that I haven't personally reviewed them over and over again."

He led the way to a far corner, dragging two wooden

benches and positioning them at a 90-degree angle. The others followed close behind. All four sat hunched over as Paul turned on the device and, well aware of where the recordings began, tuned to that location and lowered the volume. There was a way he could identify a topic after it had been recorded, and the following is what they heard:

> This is Paul speaking. Here is Thatcher Drinkwell, a fellow histarian and the Constable of the Island of St. Helena. I visited there in conjunction with my investigation of Napoleon's death. Incidentally, just as an after thought, I'm sure the emperor would have died twice if he knew about the Vichy French.
>
> Some of this might be old news for you but I have it on reliable authority that the Japanese men here are really followers of that Hiroshi Inoue guy. You know—the Islamic extremist over in Tokyo. We've already touched on it but there's a little known side effect of arsenic that those new arrivals here are interested in. I have a card here that contains a very concise statement from an histarian in Romania—a molecular biologist. Let me read it to

you. 'In Europe arsenic was used by some as a mind-altering drug. In small doses it produced a feeling of well-being and strength. When a man has once begun to indulge in it, he must continue to indulge ... or the last dose kills him. Indeed, the arsenic eater must not only continue his indulgence, he must also increase the quantity of the drug, so it is extraordinarily difficult for him to stop the habit: for, as the sudden cessation causes death, the gradual cessation produces a terrible realization that the user must continue to take arsenic until he dies.'

Paul excluded, they stared at one another in disbelief. Each bent closer to the recorder. Sylvie's eyes were reddened and Leon's forehead glistened with lines of sweat. Vincent appeared relatively calm although Paul didn't fail to hear occasional runs of toe tapping.

This ties in with the next reason for asking you to make this long trip. I've been told that you know about the effects of CR-23, AUT-45 and ERE-12. They're dispersal agents. But CR-23 is more than that. Dangerously more than that. In a sense, it acts like arsenic.

> Say a person survives a biochemical attack, like by sarin, the nerve gas, and that CR-23 had been added to the gas to make it disperse better. Well, he must have more of the additive to live. Just like arsenic. Can you imagine the chaos? People killing people to get supplies of it. Utter, utter chaos. It would lead to a cruel Armageddon.
>
> When I earlier mentioned "reliable authority" I primarily had in mind Frère Dominic, the oldest and wisest of all the histarians. He's the prior of the Cistercian Abbey Notre-Dame-de-Senanque, near Avignon, France. You know, Paul, you've visited him … at least three times.

Paul interrupted. "Yes, I did, folks … as part of three other investigations. Very, very impressive. Knows his history and much more. Only problem is I think his brain has either a loose or extra screw because he expounds on the same historical stuff during every visit. Plus he uses the very same words each time! I think I could recite it all myself. I've spoken to others and they say the same thing. And, know what? I don't think he realizes it. There must be a small kink in his brain that deals with history as he understands it. But everything else he gives out is completely lucid. I've checked on it, and so have others

in my field.

"A doctor friend of mine calls it a form of perseveration which, in the psychiatric field, is inappropriate repetition. In the prior's case, I'd say no harm but boredom. Definitely not senile. At least not the last time we saw him. And for whatever it's worth, we've become good friends. In fact he insists I call him 'Dom'.

"Here's the rest of the recording:

> And the last thing I have to say right now is that there's a fellow historian who happens to be a journalist for your country's *New York Times*, Harry Shapiro. Three months ago, he was sent on assignment to Tokyo to cover the fifteenth anniversary of the subway sarin attack and wrote an excellent article about it. I strongly suggest you speak to him when you can.
>
> This is Paul speaking. Here is Harry Shapiro:
>
> The extremist group that organized and implemented the 1995 sarin release in Tokyo was called Aum Shinrikyo, and still is. It's also known as Aum and Aleph and is a Japanese cult that combines tenets

from Hinduism and Buddhism. They're absolutely obsessed with the apocalypse, specifically with the end of the world. It was a simultaneous attack on five trains in the subway system that killed 12 commuters, seriously injured 54 and caused over 6,000 more to seek medical attention.

Aum's founder, Shoko Asahara claims he's the first enlightened one since Buddha. At the time of the attack, Aum claimed it had 40,000 members worldwide and had offices in Russia, here in the United States and obviously in Japan. The group eventually split into two factions over a dispute regarding religious beliefs. Asahara, by the way, was constantly predicting that the end of the earth was near and that only his devoted followers would survive.

So as far as I can tell we have a guy like that—Asahara Loony Tunes—still on the loose. And what are they planning? They hinted they might release a form of arsenic that can be inhaled—somewhere in the world. That would be a trial run. If it works to their liking, they'll aim for other areas, both here and abroad. Meanwhile,

they say, millions will be panicking—and dying— and that'll give them time to use it everywhere in the world.

They haven't lost their loyalty to sarin, so they reversed its letters to give the arsenic gas a special name: 'Niras'. Then the group began preaching that Niras is the name of a Buddhist goddess!

Now there's more. There are still some disenfranchised members of Aum in Tokyo. I met some of them while I was assigned there for a spell. Seems as though I talk to one every week, at least. Thatcher tells me he went into this with you, but it bears repeating.

They insist that Niras would be more potent and more dispersible if that expensive chemical, CR-23, were added to it. And on top of that, once people start inhaling the combination, they have to continue doing so—just like arsenic. So either way, they die: by inhaling it or stopping it once they start.

I could go on and on about that Inoue; about military Islamic extremists; about special operation forces and perimeter security measures that we have in this country and counter-terrorist forces in

Japan. But I think you have your hands full as it is."

"This is Paul again. Proper authorities are well aware of all of the above. David Brooks and I review it regularly. And we assume the entire U.S. citizenry is on constant alert after reading accounts and editorials that appeared in local newspapers. That is, following Shapiro's lead story in the *Times*."

Straightening, each appeared winded, including Paul. He surveyed the others. There was absolute silence for a full minute and then Sylvie broke it. Her cheeks aflame, she cried out, "I can't let this go." Patrons from across the room looked her way.

Paul rushed to her side, put his arm around her waist and drew her close. "Remember, this is all hypothetical at this stage, Syl," he whispered in her ear.

"Sorry. I couldn't help it, but so many of your early hypotheses turn into … oh, let's let it pass."

She fumbled out a tissue from her purse, dried one eye, then resumed. "But when you stop and think about it—if the Germans prevail, what does the future hold? A Germanic master race. And if the Japanese prevail? No race at all."

Following immediately upon the heels of Sylvie's

emotional remarks, Leon said, "I rarely swear but 'Jesus Christ'!"

Only Vincent offered a simple, "Paul and I—and David for that matter—have talked this to death."

"Thanks for all of that," a soon poised Leon said, directing his remark at Paul. The *Vérité* chairman then added that they had to switch the subject before their little huddle turned into an irrevocable Rubicon.

"I'll arrange the R.A.F. flight from here to Seville," he said evenly. "There's a military base just outside the city. The way they fly, they'll land you there in little more than an hour. So you can leave here… say … late morning on Friday. By the way, what does David think? That you should attend?"

"Uh-huh. And one last thing, Leon. No, make it two. You said the cabinet was kept here in Paris. Where specifically?"

"Either in the area of the Academy of Sciences or the French Academy."

"You mean within the Institut?"

"Yes, as I understand it."

"So you don't know where exactly?"

"Correct. I have no idea."

Paul looked at Sylvie.

"I don't either. In fact I never saw it." She was about to elaborate but instead joined her hands and rested them on her chin. "I must mention though …" she said, enunciating each word as if it were difficult to come

by. "I have no idea if it's related … I certainly didn't at the time. One day, I was coming out of the building and noticed a helicopter circling a couple of times around the cupola."

"When was that?" Paul asked.

"Right around the time the cabinet was reported missing."

"Okay, that's where I'm going first thing in the morning, which means around nine … nine-thirty."

"You'll go alone?" Leon inquired.

"I'd really prefer it that way, but could you make a call there to kind of introduce me? And who should I ask to see?"

Sylvie butted in. "Make it Dr. Noel Jantot in the French Academy. He knows everything about the whole Institut and is easy to deal with. He's so well educated but has such a crummy job there. You'll see."

"We go back a long way," Leon said, "and I always surmised he was a straight shooter."

"Has he ever had to?"

"What?"

"Shoot."

Leon and Sylvie traded side glances. "Not that I know of," Leon said, "but he's always carried a gun. It's in the holster at his waist, in full sight. Says it makes him feel safe."

"Good. He's the one I'll consult. I'll even level with him that I pack one, too, but not in full sight."

Paul didn't say so, but he believed he'd learn more about the SCC and its possible whereabouts if he acted alone rather than have a known former law enforcer—Leon—or an employee—Sylvie—tagging along. As for Vincent, Paul didn't anticipate he'd encounter any violence. Besides, he would be surrounded by three guns—two of his own and the one carried by Noel.

Before they split up, Leon addressed Paul: "You said a minute ago that you had another thing to bring up. Like what?"

"Well, this might sound like an extra burden but each time it entered my mind in the past, and I followed through, it paid off."

Leon focused on Paul as if three eyes were at work.

Meanwhile Paul scrunched his features before saying, "I think I should consult with the prior again. Dom, that is. Terrific guy to bounce problems off of. But I know he's one of those histarians who pays strict attention to discussing important information only in person, not by phone. And he's the senior histarian."

"So you'd have to go see him?" Leon asked.

"Yeah, and I think I should—between Seville and Buenos Aires. What I learn in Seville could provide additional information I could feed Dom. Only problem is I'd have to endure his military history spiel again."

With eyebrows uplifted as if in agreement, Leon gave Paul's midsection a gentle knuckling and said,

"Why not beat him to the punch and give it yourself? Or give one of your own. You've sent me so many of your essays on crime—and they're very informative—why not one for him?"

"Hmm … worth considering. Thanks."

Outside, the weather had turned nasty. It was still early on an October evening, but darkness hung over them and that certain kind of noisy drizzle appeared about to usher in a violent storm. Only Paul moved slowly, hands in pockets, collar raised around his neck. The others yelled goodbyes as they scattered in different directions. Paul thought he'd heard Sylvie apologize for not accompanying him to the Montparnasse because she was "completely spent in rushing to join them earlier at 4:30."

Back in his hotel room, Paul tried to digest what had transpired over the past two hours. All had agreed to call it a night and go their separate ways. If not, he felt the discussion might have continued well into the next morning.

For starters, he once again admitted he hadn't said much during the meeting and dinner itself. But that had become his style, taking in what he could but offering little in return. What had so often happened years ago was that he would unconsciously cloud an issue with too much commentary stemming from what others were arguing about or agreeing to.

But, in time, he adjusted … leaning back …

listening to every word, every inflection ... attempting to file away all other viewpoints before him. Soon after, he routinely wondered how what had gone before might assist him—or prove invaluable— in a current assignment.

Except for the flight to Seville, he didn't particularly look forward to the trips that might have to be made and decided to rely more on the suggestive advice of his closest histarian friends, at least at the beginning. Streamlining, he called it, knowing full well that exact knowledge could only be discovered in person, not by phone. If that didn't suffice, he would fly to a designated place and gather facts firsthand. This approach had paid off more recently as evidenced by several assignments that he recalled.

At the beginning of one, Leon had given him a newspaper clipping concerning their coinciding thoughts about not working directly with governments. Paul had filed it away in his satchel and every so often referred to it to refresh his memory about his "maneuverability" with any organization having ties to government, let alone the government itself. This time it would also reinforce some of what he admired about *Vérité* and its leader. He removed it from a secret compartment within the satchel and read the first few questions and answers:

Reporter: "How many *Vérité* members do you have?"

Cassell: "Over a thousand. We even have some American members. They've either worked here on long-term assignment or have worked here for good. And I stress the word 'good'. All of our membership works to seek the truth. That's our basic motivation."

Reporter: "I see. And seeking the truth is admirable, but other than your mission projects, what other things do you concentrate on?"

Cassell: "First we limit our energies to the greater Paris area. Basically we take up causes as they develop. At the heart of it is our effort to get at the truth, to go beyond the facade of political and special interest rhetoric. For example, we'll soon be taking up the cause of preserving our city's 500 parks and gardens. Certain industrialists claim that's too many, that they hurt industrial development and the creation of jobs. Fact of the matter is that these same industrialists have histories of corruption—graft and the like. We're very proud of our work in conservation. Just as some people—like Paul D'Arneau whom we talked about before—strive to conserve works of art, we want to conserve our

> natural resources. Some say we're nothing more than a glorified advocacy group, but we're much more than that. Advocacy groups and governments come and go but *Vérité* remains a constant. Did you know we're nearly 200 years old?"

Paul had read through the article only a few times before but still felt he could recite it verbatim.

It had been an unusually full day and he was about to retire when he heard a knock on the door. He hurried to one of his guns and cracked the door open. Sylvie stood there with a sheepish grin.

"I'm not as tired as I thought I was," she said.

And Paul, ecstatic, said, "But you might be, soon."

# Chapter 4

They both slept soundly throughout the night and when Paul arose at about seven, Sylvie had already left. Before falling asleep at ten, she had indicated she would be leaving early in the morning. She had also said that the Academies opened at nine, and "Don't forget, it's Dr. Noel Jantot you want to see. He'd be the most helpful."

After their earlier lovemaking, which had been swift but repeated, Sylvie dozed on and off, but Paul felt in a talkative mood. He harked back to Yale and his dismissal as chairman of the history department for two alleged reasons: (1) a bestseller about his thoughts regarding Napoleon's death (university higher-ups disagreed vehemently with his conclusions), and (2) repeated confrontations over his beliefs regarding mythology. The latter was the reason that irked him the most and, after he

was ousted, he let it be known that he was about to resign anyway. They branded him "regressive" in his thinking about the subject.

He started to perspire again as he lay there staring at the darkened ceiling, recanting most of what had been claimed—that he had gone beyond using myths as a teaching tool, helping students understand many things before true science produced facts. That before long, he began to believe the myths themselves. But it was his reference to classicist Edith Hamilton that had became the crowning blow. She had suggested that myths led society back in time when the world was young and its people had a connection with the earth and nature, with trees and flowers and hills and seas, unlike anything the people themselves could feel. In other words, through myths people were able to retrace the path from civilized man who lives so far from nature, to man who lives so close to it. Paul would always replay Hamilton's beliefs with the same wording, whether he was verbalizing them to someone or simply running them through his mind.

He bunched up three pillows, turned on the tiny light attached to the back of his side of their bed, reached over to the top drawer of his nightstand, and withdrew a book and some notes for a lecture he was scheduled to deliver at Columbia University. He had decided to speak about mythology, considering it a perfect slap in the faces of Yale authorities. But would he lose his job at the library? He checked with Bill Robbins, the only assistant dean

with whom he remained friendly and the only one who opposed his dismissal as a Yale professor.

"Just don't mention Yale at all," Robbins said. "Yalies know you like to lecture on mythology. It's as elementary as that, so I recommend going ahead with it."

Consulting his notes and leafing through the book, one titled *Don't Know Much About Mythology* by Kenneth C. Davis, a *New York Times* bestselling author, Paul began speaking softly. Extracting various lines from the book, he indicated that myths were explanations made long ago, before science came into being—to understand what people were witnessing. Things like lightning and changes of season, and love, and hate, and death. And they used gods, heroes and monsters to provide the explanations. It was the best that humans could do at the time because they couldn't provide a scientific accounting for what they were witnessing.

He had read Davis' book twice before, cover to cover, and considered him his favorite mythology writer. His favorite two lines from the book were: "Natural events, as well as human behavior, all came to be understood through tales of gods, goddesses, and heroes. Thunder, earthquakes, eclipses, rain, and the success of crops were all due to the intervention of powerful gods." He incorporated the lines in every one of his lectures, and he didn't fail to mention them in bed.

One myth he also brought up involved the Greeks,

indicating that most listeners identified with this more than any other one they'd ever read. The Greeks believed that, at one time, all the world's evils and problems were trapped inside a box. When this box was opened by the first woman, all of them escaped before she was able to close the lid. They called her Pandora. 'Opening Pandora's box'."

Paul then explained how well-known identifiable things and people drew on mythical themes. "Some call it, *Going to the Movies*," he said. "For example, consider: *Finding Nemo*; *X-Men*; *The Terminator Trilogy*; *Troy*; and above all, *Star Wars*. All these draw on mythical themes.

"Often they took animal form, like the African Rabbit or Native American Coyote. Sounds like *Bugs Bunny* and his nemesis, *Willy Coyote* to me!

"In fact, many of the trappings of Christmas, including Christmas trees, wreaths, mistletoe, holly and ivy, are borrowed from ancient traditions of northern Europe where the evergreen symbolized the hope for new life in the dead of winter.

"Next," Paul said, "to understand more of what I'm getting at, consider doing the following:

Check the calendar: the names of all the days and months derive from Greek, Roman and Norse mythology.

Check the planets in our solar system: all except earth are named after Roman gods.

Check our language: loaded with words from our mythic past.

And directly from the book, he read: "Do you buy books from Amazon.com? Are you wearing a pair of Nikes? How about words like panacea, panic, hypnosis, morphine, leprechaun, typhoon, hurricane?"

Yawning, he stated that he handled Toynbee the same way, quoting the famous historian's beliefs to anyone who would listen. "The essence of his writings on the subject," Paul said, "is that history grew out of mythology, as anyone who's read Homer's *Iliad* would discover. Anyone who starts reading it as history will find that it's full of fiction, but the opposite is also true."

It reminded him of Eva Perón's reported life in Argentina. But what didn't? And the mention of Argentina evoked memories of Buenos Aires and Paul's several visits there as the guest of Captain Joe Gomez of its police department.

Paul yawned again and before turning off the light, checked on Sylvie's reaction. She was fast asleep. He was too tired to be upset. And besides, she had heard the very same discourse once before— when she'd referred to it as his "sermon on the mount."

After Sylvie had left in the morning, he took his time grooming, then picked at a light breakfast that was delivered to his room, for he had decided to leave for the Institut around nine-fifteen. At nine-ten, the phone rang.

It was Leon.

"Just spoke with Noel Jantot," he said. "Told him all about your background, your previous work with *Vérité* and that you've been hired ... ah ... commissioned to find the SCC. He's anxious to meet with you."

"And I with him."

"Now, one thing, Paul: don't be surprised at his clothing. In contrast to the other 39 members of the French Academy, all his trousers have a shiny military-like stripe running down their sides. Those and the gun are his trademark."

"Hmm ... strange."

"Not really. He spent years in the military and the others have never complained. In fact, they only meet weekly on a regular basis, but he's usually there full-time for one reason or another and he's paid a meager salary. Right now, I think he's working on a book about the five academies of the Institut and the 1,000 foundations it manages. And in case he refers to it, don't be uneasy if he acts separate from the four other branches of the Institut, in terms of ... well ... in terms of how the members of his own branch are described. I know it sounds confusing but, to repeat myself, there are five distinct academies that comprise the Institut and his is called 'The French Academy'."

"You were about to say how the members are described. How?"

"As the 'Immortals'. He feels it's too complimentary

and he just wants to be called an ordinary member. Truth be known, the rest of his academy view him as their chairman, leader, commander, whatever."

"Maybe that's why, subconsciously, he feels the need to dress like he does."

"I agree," Leon said. "But the important thing now is that he can fill you in on whatever he knows about the SCC.

"Final point, Paul, and I'll let you go. He said to enter the Institut building by a private side entrance—on the right. It's the only one marked 'PRIVATE" and has a security guard there. Say your name plus '*Vérité*' and he'll bring you directly to Noel's office by a shortcut back route. That way, you avoid the crowds and the expanse of the place."

"Got it."

"Fine, my friend. Bye for now and good luck."

"Wait, Leon! I almost forgot. Does he know the content of the cabinet folders?"

"He's let it be known that he has a rough idea of what the scientific findings are. But most puzzling—and mysterious at the same time—he's hinted to a few other members that one of the folders had top-secret information in it that's unrelated to those findings. The folder is there but the pages in it—said to be two inches thick—may be missing. Then again, they may not."

"I see. Do you know what the top-secret stuff is all about?"

The silence that followed had a sound to it because it was so intense.

After a full 15 seconds, Paul said, "Are you still there?"

"Yes, I'm still here, and I wasn't going to tell you something just yet because I have no proof of it, and I wanted to see if you could verify it independent of what I might reveal."

Paul didn't hold back. "C'mon," he said, "let's have it. It may help me verify … is that how you expressed it?"

"Okay, I suppose I'd better. I'm not at all certain the thief was after the research findings of our French scientists. The folder had a piece of faded paper that tells of a French stem cell researcher whose family was Vichy French. His grandmother married a Nazi who's still alive and, at 94, is living in Buenos Aires. But 70 years ago, he was commander-in-chief of a unit that organized the extinction of thousands and thousands of Jews. The folder was hidden among the other ones, I've been told."

Leon lowered his voice some as if to share a most sacred secret. "Please don't ever quote me," he said, "but I'm wondering if this individual had—or still has —anything to do with Switzerland's being a safe haven for Jewish money and their possessions. So that indirectly much of any so-called Swiss money that might flow into stem cell research could be considered of Jewish origin."

"How's that again?" Paul asked.

"Before killing the Jews, they stripped them of their money and had it stored secretly in Switzerland."

"And?"

"Then future stem cell research originating in Switzerland could be regarded as being financed by those deceased German Jews. Ultimately, their descendents—those who settled in Argentina—might have a legitimate claim on anything positive relating to stem cells in the future. And possibly the Swiss could use this as a bargaining chip if some countries make it difficult for those Swiss banks that helped outside citizens dodge taxes.

"Anyway, that's how I see it," Leon said. There was more than a particle of conviction in his voice.

"Sounds possible and all the more reason for my visiting Buenos Aires." Paul took down Leon's last sentence, then remarked, "But I don't get it. If it was **that** folder the thief or thieves were after, why didn't they just pull it out and be done with it?"

"Because—and this is just a shot in the dark—in whatever confusion there might have been and in the least amount of time, it might have been easier to steal the whole cabinet rather than flip through it."

"Sounds logical enough. Hmm ...," Paul said. "I'm using 'sounds' a lot. Well, here's one more thing that might sound stupid—or maybe not. It's about something I've been wondering about for some time

now. In fact, I hinted at it in one of the books I wrote about Napoleon."

Paul imagined Leon grinning as if he knew what was coming.

"And as long as we've been sharing information more and more, this might be an ideal time to question you about something—and I won't feel intrusive about it."

Leon said, "Go right ahead."

"Here's the question then: You know, I'm sure, that the books I've written about Napoleon are both fiction and non-fiction. Can I bring up a subject about you that's not been made public, as far as I know?"

"Please do. I have nothing to hide."

"I've been told you're related to Napoleon."

"Correct."

Paul registered no surprise and responded, "But why hasn't it been made public?"

"It has—way back—but no one seems to care."

"It doesn't affect your thinking then?"

"Why should it? I believe he was a tyrant in general but a valuable asset in certain respects. He loved to pile up victories, not to add to his geographic possessions as much as just winning a war or a tiny conflict. It was winning that counted with him, that's all. And I admire that—whether we're related or not."

Paul wasn't certain of what he wanted to say next but he went ahead anyway. "Just like you. I mean 'winning'.

Right?"

"Right."

"Understand, Leon, I'm not criticizing, I'm complimenting, because I happen to be a big fan of Napoleon—more so since I was the one who investigated the circumstances of his death and had them published."

"I know that and I appreciate what you did."

"Like?"

"Like writing what you did and proving our relationship. Through DNA, I might add. Although you left my name out, which is fine."

"Yeah, I figured that was best."

Paul sounded impatient. "So you're related and our investigation is completely unrelated to him, so let's get off the subject," he said distantly.

Paul's conclusion was that what he had just brought up might account for Leon's fierce desire for victories in so many different instances. And even his longevity as chairman of *Gens de Vérité*.

On three other occasions, Paul had seen the Institut, which was situated across the Seine from the Louvre's eastern end. Each time, he agreed with experts that it was a masterpiece of neoclassical architecture. But this time he didn't bother to gawk at its vastness, its grandeur. Instead he headed straight for the side entrance, spoke with the security guard and posthaste was accompanied to Noel's office.

He appeared about sixty, was uniquely handsome and well groomed. Silver wavy hair, blue eyes and an arresting smile conveyed a picture of a movie star rather than one charged with the responsibilities he'd gladly accepted. His attire was indeed militaristic but not completely so: light gray shirt with darker gray tie and the previously described pants with a belt that bore a small holster and pistol. Standing tall and erect, his handshake was firm and prolonged, a spitting imitation of Paul's.

"So you're the Paul D'Arneau I've heard so much about," he said, his voice calm and sincere.

"Cassell talks too much," Paul responded.

"No, not just Leon—others too. You've developed quite a reputation."

"Well, thank you, Noel ... uh ... I may call you Noel?"

"By all means. Let's make it Paul and Noel."

Paul already felt he'd known the man for years and that their discussion would be one of truth, sincerity and, especially, of value. He scanned the large room which was nearly devoid of furniture, book cases or anything ornamental. A desk and two chairs before it were the only things that gave the room any semblance of an office. A long table with piles of books, papers and writing materials ran parallel to the desk with little space to wedge one's way between them. There were no pictures on the walls except a large one depicting the

Institut building at the top and under it, an area below its cupola bearing two collections of seats. Leon had earlier informed Paul that all meetings of the academies were held there, the green seats for academy members, the gray for invited guests.

Paul felt he should comment in some way or another. "So this is your office, Noel—where you do all your work, write your books, tend to business." He thought if he framed things that way, he would be downplaying any disbelief in its simplicity.

"Yes, and I know what you're thinking: it's very barren."

"Not quite."

"What then? How would you describe it? But before you answer, I must say this is the way I like it. No clutter, not much to clean and so forth. I thought they'd add the savings to my salary but it never happened. I'm still at your equivalent of 60 dollars a week and now they want me to teach a course I'd call, *Nanotechnology, Cloud Crowd, Big Data and Self Health.*"

The corner of his lower lip wrinkled as if to convey feigned disappointment. "They haven't brought up an increase in salary yet, but I'm hoping. I'm free to bring in materials from elsewhere as needed though, and I do get somewhat of a return on my books."

The elaboration gave Paul time to think of a better answer to the question about his barren room. "How would I describe it?", you asked me.

"Spartan."

"Spartan! That's ideal! My 'Spartan Quarters'."

"And your salary is spartan," Paul said. "Let's hope they raise it. And how did you come up with the title of your course? It's quite a mouthful."

"A tech journalist wrote about the subjects some time ago in *The Wall Street Journal* –Michael S. Malone. I was so impressed that I copied down some of the things he wrote. Here, let me read you a few. He opened a nearby thick folder and, without looking, pulled out two or three papers from the middle of a stack, as if he knew exactly where they were located. Noel signaled for Paul to sit in one of the chairs before his desk. He complied and Noel sat in the other one.

"I'll hurry through this and extrapolate because I know you have other things on your mind. With that, he began:

> Though nanotechnology has largely disappeared from the front pages, it is now coming into its own. Breakthrough medicines; genetic research; new materials such as graphene—that's a lattice-sheet form of carbon used for everything from filters to computer chips; molecular electronics; and quantum computing have all been announced in recent months.

"Understand, Paul, this was written some time ago, so we're really ahead of the game now. But finishing up with nanotech:

> Indeed, the range of emerging applications for nano materials is so wide-ranging and important that, together, they suggest an impending turning point in high tech as important as silicon and integrated circuitry were half a century ago. Nanotech, 3-D printing and other innovations point to a coming golden era, if we can unleash the animal spirits of the market.

"Next we have Cloud Crowd:

> In the world of information technology, the big story these days is the shift of data management from largely in-house computing centers to rented, easily scalable computing and storage from anonymous servers located somewhere out in the Internet. Much of this shift, driven by leading providers such as Amazon, is already well underway, rapidly driving down costs and making information management much

more affordable both for industry and, increasingly, consumers.

"Then there's Big Data:

> This is the application of all of this new computing power to reach beyond the individual application of mass information to the mass application of individual data––for instance, by tracking a billion sensors in real time to monitor weather across a continent. It could mean capturing every step in the path of every shopper in a store over the course of a year, or monitoring every vital sign of a patient every second for the course of his or her illness. The big data revolution is already happening, with hundreds of applications already in use—for instance, tracking millions of chickens from farms in Thailand to family tables around the world, or monitoring the location in real time of every emergency vehicle in a major city like Chicago. Over the next few years, it will spread across every industry and scientific discipline.

"Finally we have Self-Health:

> While Washington, the national media and the general public focus on draconian responses to the rising cost of health care, for-profit businesses are busy inventing small, affordable solutions. For example, there are now more then 12,000 new health-care apps available from independent developers for the iPhone and iPad.
>
> Meanwhile, the first of scores of new home diagnostic and monitoring devices––small, affordable, and increasingly connected to health professionals via the web—are now appearing on the scene. They promise greater drug regimen adherence—the current failure of which is a huge social cost; early identification of everything from a drug reaction to a heart attack; better maintenance of chronic diseases such as diabetes and hepatitis; and virtual doctor visits that make use of home monitoring devices and communication tools such as Skype.

Noel stared at Paul who complimented him on a concise but thorough job.

"Lots of material there," Paul said. "As you know, much of it has already begun but definitely include

it in your lectures. As time goes on, you can add or subtract."

"One last thing, Paul—not related to what I've already covered—and it has to do with Japan and stem cells. Many major newspapers claim they've been sloppy in their research. Please don't ask my opinion about it because I couldn't be sure. Fact is, many countries can get sloppy. You know though, we went to war with Japan and Germany. As of this date, I can truthfully say that I trust the Germans more, even though some are **hiding**—and I think that's what it is— in Argentina. The Japanese on the other hand? I can't give a passing mark because of the way they surprised people in the past. And now I hear they are the complainants. That doesn't make sense to me.

"Sorry to go on like this. My wife tells me that's the way I always behave when I'm either excited or depressed. Must be a character flaw, but I can't help it."

"I understand," Paul responded.

Noel then said, "Thanks for listening. May I offer you some coffee or tea?"

Paul refused. The question barely registered, for he wanted to get to the subject of the cabinet. "Now then," he said, "the reason I'm here: it's about the cabinet with the 50 or more folders. Is it okay for me to ask you about it?"

"Yes, I expect you to. The cabinet, Leon tells me, is why you've been commissioned by *Vérité* in the first

place."

"That's correct. Just as long as you don't think I'm too forward."

"I don't whatsoever, so go right ahead."

"Good. So it's missing, but are you free to tell me where it was kept?"

"Certainly. Right here. In fact over there in that last closet." He pointed to a door at the rear of the room.

Paul took out a small pad and entered some notes in it.

"For as long as the French research went on?" he asked.

"Yes, a matter of years."

"Next," Paul said, "about the cupola above us. How does one get to it?"

"Take one of the elevators as far as it will go, then walk up about 20 steps."

"Is there an accompanying walkway?"

"Yes."

"When you get to the top, or at least near it, is there a walking space around it?"

"Yes, there's a narrow esplanade there—very narrow."

"But wide enough for the cabinet to fit on it?"

"I'd say so … yes."

Paul made more notes before Noel asked, "Would you like to go see?"

"No, that won't be necessary, but back to the cabinet.

Are you aware of what the folders contain? I mean what your scientists had put forward?"

"Yes, for the most part."

"And that there was a single folder about Vichy France and Nazi Germany?"

"Yes, in a manner of speaking." Noel said.

"Meaning?"

"Meaning I don't know the details but I understand that part of it covers those two places."

"What do you think of that particular folder?"

"Think of it?"

"Yeah, is it your opinion that it was stuck in with the other folders just to hide it?"

Noel didn't mull it over for a second. "A real possibility," he said. "or it could be missing."

Paul had no intention of even alluding to Leon's talk about the past commander of Nazi forces who was still alive, but he did want to bring up the helicopter issue.

"You might think this is an unfair and probably irrelevant question but are helicopters often seen flying around near the cupola? Circling around might be a better way of describing it."

Noel kept a straight face. "I've rarely seen any flying overhead, but always in a straight line, not circling."

Paul wanted to extract what he could about the matter. "Let me just ask hypothetically then: if the cabinet were rolled up the walkway by as many men as needed, could it then be lifted up into a helicopter by a

rope or ropes? I mean, given the fact the space is narrow up at the top."

"Yes, easily."

What Paul primarily wanted to accomplish by visiting the Institut had been completed: to confirm that the SCC had disappeared and had been stored there until then. Any other points that came up—Vichy France, what Noel knew about the SCC, the helicopter theory—were supplemental.

There was some concluding small talk and, at the door, he thanked Noel repeatedly and promised that he would keep in touch.

The Frenchman responded, "Works both ways, and be assured I'm at your disposal 24-hours a day, Paul."

It was not yet 11:00 a.m. and most of what was predicted to be a dry, splendid day lay ahead. But what to do now? Besides calling Leon to relay the substance of the just-ended meeting, and also to check in with David, Paul made a quick decision. Instead of waiting until the following morning to fly to Seville, he would do so in the next few hours. He hoped the R.A.F. would be available.

Arriving a day in advance would allow him time to meet some scientists who had the same idea and would guarantee that he would be well rested before the forum began. After a ten-minute discussion with Leon and the call to the R.A.F., Paul was granted the change of plans and told that once the plane landed, a taxi would be ready

to drive him the 15 miles to the Vincci La Rabida Hotel in center city. It was where Leon had stayed on several occasions.

Paul left his guns in a sealed box at the hotel's front desk and asked Leon to deliver them back to Vincent with thanks.

The one-hour flight to Seville passed before Paul had a chance to review all that had transpired at the Institut, and he wondered if he should have interviewed representatives from the four other academies: the French Academy and the Academies of Humanities, Fine Arts and Political Sciences.

He also read through a leaflet he'd been given by Noel upon leaving. It was filled with historical facts about the building but what caught Paul's eye was a statement that during the French Revolution, the academies had disappeared only to be reestablished by Napoleon in 1805.

At the hotel, Paul registered at the main desk. The clerk asked if he was there because of the scientific forum.

"Yes, and I'm looking forward to it," Paul replied.

"I am sorry monsieur, but it has been postponed for two weeks." His English was stilted but perfect.

"Postponed? Why?"

"Because one of the speakers has died. He was one of our guests."

Paul was speechless. He looked left and right, up

and down before inquiring. "Who and how?"

The clerk said the details would be in all the newspapers so it would not be improper for him to read from a small card he took out of a drawer.

"His name is Dr. Albert Kesler," he said. "He was from the United States and was found dead in the bathtub. His neck was slashed.

# Chapter 5

As though struck by an unanticipated sidewinder, Paul nearly fell over. He had never met the man, but he felt he knew him through all the laudatory things David Brooks had said about him and the way he was running the Division of Stem Cell Research at Hollings General Hospital. As a professional treasure hunter, Paul had faced unexpected thefts of valuables from his home or other hotels, even from his car. Almost all had been eventually retrieved.

But he had never experienced anything of this nature. A human valuable that could **never** be retrieved. Yet, he mustered up the wherewithal to proceed properly. He began by asking the clerk to repeat what was on the card. He listened intently. Next he asked when Dr. Kesler had checked in.

"Yesterday."

"Yesterday? That early?"

"That is correct, monsieur. I was the one who checked him in and even asked if he had the correct date."

"Did he give an answer?"

"No. I remember clearly that he ignored the question and instead asked me how long it would take to travel by train from here to Hamburg."

"And you said?"

"With a Eurail pass … about five hours."

"Did he ask for it to be arranged?"

"No. He began to calculate out loud. He said something like 'five hours each way and maybe one or two hours there'. Then he wrote something on a piece of paper and said he would think about it and let me know within the hour."

By then, some of Paul's emotion over the murder began to be replaced by curiosity over Kesler's possible visit to Germany. Although it was perfectly straight, Paul adjusted his tie.

"What time did he check in yesterday morning … uh … what's your name anyway?"

"Donald. Donald Durand. I was born and raised in Brooklyn and moved here with my family about eight years ago."

"I see. That's why your English is so good … and your memory's not so bad either."

"Thank you, monsieur."

"So when did he check in?"

For the first time, Durand looked uncomfortable. He consulted a computer before answering. "It was 8:15 in the morning. Are you an American police officer?"

"You can call me that. Anyway, did he have you arrange the train trip?"

"Yes, for both ways." The clerk's face turned grim. He then added, "Perhaps I should not be saying this but he then asked me a question I had never been asked before."

"Which was?"

"Can a kind of gendarme be hired in Hamburg to sit beside me on my way back to here?"

Paul's expression turned judicial. "And what happened to be your response to that?"

" 'I will check on it'. But he just stood there. I wanted to change the subject … I'm not sure why … but I did, and he went along with it."

"What did you change it to?"

"Nothing serious, as I recall. Something about sudden weather changes."

Paul's mouth turned dry. He believed it was time to ask the burning question he'd been saving: "The throat slashing … was a weapon left behind?"

"Yes. A dagger."

Immediately Paul thought of David's description of the one lodged in the Connecticut governor's chest several

weeks before. The one with an ornate wooden handle. The mate of the one David couldn't recover among Eva Perón's artifacts in Buenos Aires. One of the pair that her two body guards prominently displayed whenever they accompanied her on public appearances. In addition to their loaded guns. David and Police Captain Gomez had never been able to account for the missing mate although they had spent hours delving through boxes of epaulets, badges, wrist bracelets, medals, cuff- links, boots with protective knives in their sockets and caps adorned with Evita's picture.

Her family had donated all known artifacts to a museum in Buenos Aires, *The Museo Evita*, and it was there that the two had searched without success. Paul informed the clerk about all that went into the hunt and then asked him what he thought of Eva Perón.

"You mean Evita?" the clerk replied.

" 'Evita' ... 'Eva' ... what's the difference?"

"Plenty," the clerk said, crimping his mouth in annoyance. "'Evita' conveys stature. In a way, she was the female equivalent of a young Napoleon Bonaparte."

Was Paul hearing right? He **had** to play along. "But she didn't go around conquering nations," he said.

"No, but she went around conquering individual people—one way or another."

Paul, having once written a biography of Napoleon, led the clerk on and was impressed with his knowledge of the emperor's career, including rifts with Talleyrand,

love trysts with Lady Beckett, who was the top executive of the British East India Company, and the last six years of his life in the Longwood House on St. Helena. The impression was matched, however, with a distinct impression that the clerk was "missing a few marbles." Paul changed the subject.

"Any chance I could see the dagger?" he asked. "What's your best guess?"

"I suppose it's at the Guardia precinct, but I have a photo of it."

"A photo? How did that happen?"

Durand looked more like a police officer than a hotel desk clerk when he answered: "The Civil Guard said they were short-handed so asked me to participate by taking photos of the whole crime scene. I've helped them out before like that—when they were overloaded or when some of their help was on vacation—that sort of thing."

The clerk took out a small envelope from his jacket pocket and a Manila envelope from behind the counter. He handed them to Paul. The photo in the envelope was a close-up of a dagger with a handle that was ornate and probably wooden, but he couldn't be sure it was the missing mate. He shuffled through the remaining dozen photos in the envelope. However, he didn't study them, as his mind focused more on the similarity of the two daggers and the fact that this current one had never been located.

At first, he considered it most unusual for the clerk to have a separate photo of the murder weapon on his person, but on second thought and for the time being, decided to put the issue on hold.

Before giving thanks and leaving, Paul said, "Oh, by the way, was the dagger left in Kesler's neck or just left nearby?"

"Nearby—on the floor."

Now Paul's task was, first, to inform Leon, then David. He went to La Rabida's cafeteria, ordered a cup of tea and two packages of saltine crackers, then sat in its Andalusian patio and munched on the crackers. Eating saltines was another of his neurotic habits when he felt nervous, confused or otherwise unhinged. Ten minutes passed before he used his smartphone to call Leon.

Throughout their give-and-take conversation, Leon said more than once, "And the plot thickens."

"So your Hollings speaker went to Hamburg, came back to Seville, was murdered with a dagger that might have matched the one used in your governor's murder, and the forum's been postponed for two weeks. That's about it, right?"

"That's about it," Paul replied. "Wait! Except for the other thing the clerk told me."

"Which was?"

"It was when Kesler asked to have a gendarme hired. The clerk said he must have suspected something would take place or was warned about something while

there in Hamburg. It made him fear for his life."

"Yes, of course," Leon said dismissively. "But now it's my turn. I'd call it 'new news'."

"What now? I'm getting sick on crackers." Leon was well aware of the habit.

"A Swiss gentleman called me. Name's Leonard Swing … something or other. He called to reiterate Switzerland's wish to cooperate in any way it can regarding the banking problems there. He's sort of a roving representative for their wealth management team and is often assigned to Seville. Calls me about every six months."

"Why's that?"

"He wants to keep on the good side of *Vérité*. It's held in high regard in Switzerland. Incidentally, this time your name came up."

"Mine? Why?"

"Hope you don't mind. I brought it up when he asked what I was doing lately—just to make conversation."

"And?"

"And he jumped at the opportunity to say he's heard of you and once met you briefly."

"Oh … how?"

"Through a wealthy Swiss family … very good friends … whose painting of Heidelberg Castle had been stolen and you found it for them last year."

Paul's eyes brightened. "Ah, yes," he nearly shouted. "I remember it well. Well paid, too. But that's German

and he's Swiss. Name's Swingeth by the way. Leonard Swingeth. The Swiss family that commissioned me is Rosen—nice people."

"Jewish?"

"I believe so," Paul answered.

He stated that he was about to notify David about the murder too, but just before they disconnected. Leon said that Lenny Swingeth wanted to meet with him again.

"With me? Why?"

"Who knows?"

"And we couldn't do it by phone?"

"I mentioned it to him, and that you're very busy, but he insisted."

"Let it go for now, Leon, but if he contacts you again about it … agree to it and we'll take it from there."

The call to David was of a different character and tone—one not only of total surprise and sorrow but also because of Kesler's influence in Hollings' scientific reorganization that included stem cell study. David spent an extraordinary amount of time boasting about that influence, so much so that Paul chose to interrupt him. "…And was he married?" he asked.

"I think he was briefly, but they divorced."

"Was he thoroughly vetted before being hired?"

"Thoroughly. He did speak of a cottage he owned in Germany, but we never bothered to check it out."

After Paul detailed all he could remember about what had transpired since they last conversed, David

said. "You want me there, Paul? I can fly out of JFK this afternoon."

"No. Rest assured I'll keep you informed and if the time ever arrives when I'd need you here, you'll be the first to know." It was a tiny jab at humor that, under the circumstances, failed in its intent.

"But come to think of it," Paul said, "because of your law enforcement background and your contacts with police officials, could you verify that I know my stuff and stretch a point with any authorities about it? If they question it, I'd give your name. And I'm talking about those here in Seville, in Hamburg and in Japan. Possibly in Switzerland and any others I'll call you about. But from here, those are the places I need to go, and I'd need the authority you could provide. That'll give me the freedom to investigate, to interrogate and so on."

"By all means. I'll get onto it as soon as we hang up."

"'Stat', right? And please don't mention I'm an histarian anywhere."

"Stat and agreed upon."

"Thanks. And if you could start with where I am now—Seville—I'd like to examine his hotel room today. Probably the Civil Guard already has but who cares; I want to also. Maybe they missed something."

"I can vouch for your thoroughness, Paul, so if they did miss anything, you'll outdo them."

Paul let the compliment pass and continued: "You

may be wondering about Buenos Aires. I'm definitely including it but our mutual friend, Captain Joe Gomez, can help out plenty there. In fact, travel-wise, that may be the place I'll start with, given some information I already have."

Paul was well aware he had promised Leon he'd remain tight-lipped about the 94-year-old now residing there. He was also well aware that when David Brooks said "stat", he meant "immediately", as was the case with all physicians.

He thought that he'd bide some time for David to act so he ordered another cup of tea. While sipping it, he decided it would be common courtesy to phone the *casas cuartel*, the nearest Guardia precinct, in order to ask permission to examine Kesler's room. He waited five or six minutes and called.

"Si si, claro," was the response. It was an affirmative phrase Paul had heard before and indicated that David had gotten through. The official then added—in fractured English— that they had assisted him in the past and were happy with his work and cooperation.

Paul then hurried to his own room and packed, for after the visit to Kesler's, he intended to squeeze in the visit to the prior at the Senanque Monastery in Provence before traveling to Buenos Aires.

He nearly forgot to inform Leon, who would have to notify the R.A.F. Leon listened silently to Paul's plans, then indicated he would make all necessary arrangements,

including informing Vincent who—at Paul's request—would make both trips. Leon would also notify the prior that they would arrive at about four or five to talk about what would probably be mutual concerns.

Paul introduced himself to one of the hotel's managers, Mr. Trompert, and was told that the Civil Guard had already left Kesler's room. He was also told about a phone call he'd received from David whose credentials and excellent reputation he'd known about for some time.

Paul was given a key, and, in contrast to the preceding wild few minutes, strolled casually to an elevator. The room was on the sixth floor and he did something he had never done before: he rode the elevator up and down several times, thus allowing him time to complete a line of thinking that had begun to plague him. What had started out as a single responsibility—to find a cabinet—had turned into a potpourri of other things, including murder, stem cells, Vichy France, Swiss banking, Nazis, Jews and, of all things, eugenics. He was certain they were all related but **how** was the question. The trick, he thought—and he would defer doing so until he was on the flight to Buenos Aires—was to sort out as much as he could about each item and then to string them together into something workable, or at least logical.

Kesler's room was frighteningly quiet, Paul's every move doubling in sound. He made a cursory examination of a single suitcase, all drawers, the bathroom, the first of

two closets and even beneath the bed's mattress.

Then, remembering Sparky's advice about paying attention to detail, he repeated the process, even picking up items, holding them up to the light and twirling them around.

He found nothing significant, but upon reaching the second closet and running his hands along a suit jacket there, realized an inside pocket contained something the Civil Guard had overlooked. In fact, he wondered why they hadn't confiscated all of Kesler's possessions. He unzipped an inside pocket and withdrew a letter. Written in longhand, it read:

> *Go to Hamburg or else. Be at the Hauptbahnhof Station by 12 noon. Do not worry—we know what you look like from your picture that is always in your newsletter. So we will seek you out among the passengers. Your newsletter has been different the last few times. You must stop it.*

Paul was taken with the "or else", with the "we" instead of "I" and, once again, with the perfect English. At first, he thought it was some sort of hoax. But how or why could that be? Did someone compose it and plant it there after he'd received permission to search the room? Unlikely.

He reread the letter and concluded it was legitimate and had been written by Kesler's murderer. The doctor apparently hadn't agreed to go along with whatever was demanded of him.

He decided not to place the letter back into the jacket pocket; instead, he would turn it over to the authorities via the assistant manager he's spoken to before, Mr. Trompert.

Downstairs, the manager read it, then looked up at Paul skeptically.

"No, I didn't write it," Paul said. "You can check my handwriting if you wish."

"That won't be necessary, Mr. D'Arneau. I'll just give it to the police authorities."

Paul was about to leave the counter when he turned and said, "By the way, Mr. Trompert, would you happen to have any of Dr. Kesler's newsletters hanging around, as it were?"

"I'd be happy to check, sir. One minute."

Trompert disappeared into a back area and returned within that minute.

"Here are four of them," he said. "They come out every month."

More things to read, time permitting.

Somehow, time didn't matter when it came to thoughts of Frère Dominic, which had become almost an obsession, for past consultations with him had both consolidated his current thinking and introduced

possibilities he hadn't even considered. But he fought off such general thoughts in favor of at least glancing at the newsletters he'd been handed.

The four issues of Dr. Kesler's *Stem Cell Review* included sidebars about Swiss and Vichy French history. One even contained a passing comment about "Japan's regret over its past history involving the U.S." On the surface, the sidebars appeared innocent enough, although the wording was less formal than the main articles. Almost as if written by another person. To Paul, such wording brought back memories of coded messages in a previous case, one that had taken him to Kuala Lumpur, of all places. Yet, he refused to dwell on the subject, for he wanted to save time to review what he wanted to glean from the prior—and to email him one of his many essays on crime for, in a manner of speaking, it would coincide with the subject matter of the prior's inevitable dissertations on world-wide wars.

He emailed Frère Rudolph, the sub-prior of the Senanque Monastery, first asking if Frère Dominic would be willing to see him and Vincent. And second, about receiving an essay titled "The Changing Face of Crime." Paul waited impatiently for a full 15 minutes before Rudolph answered back, indicating the prior would be delighted to have them visit with him and was extremely impressed with what Paul had written:

Hello and best wishes, Frère Dominic.

I hope we might drop by for another of our interesting conversations and to hear your recitation on wars and killings again. In conjunction with that, I've herein included a short essay I wrote last week for statewide newspapers. Thought you might be interested:

The mystery of the last several years is what caused the rash of mass shooters from Los Angeles to Littleton to the Washington Beltway to Newtown, Connecticut, to Boston and at too many points in between. Not so mysterious is that although crime rates including most murder types have dipped, America has been accosted by a changing face of crime that defies easy explanation.

A motive-of-the-month mentality has sprouted nationally. There are those who speak of an "angry white man syndrome". Still others blame family alienation; or television, movie, and video game violence; or copycat crime; or drugs; or increased bitterness of the urban underclass. (Yet killers from suburbia have dominated the news lately). And if all these aren't enough, there is still the timeworn

list of power, sex, money, poverty, and child abuse.

The mass murderer, as a horrified nation has read too often lately, enters a public or semi-public place (like a school, post office or business) and opens fire. Sociology and psychology experts state this kind of killer differs from, say, a serial or spree killer in that the mass murderer does not expect to get away with his crime whereas the serial killer does, and the spree killer hasn't even thought that far ahead. The mass murderer is mission-oriented and is making a statement so important to his psyche (or to his beliefs as in the case of a determined terrorist) that he doesn't plan on coming out alive. Such is the weight of his warped motive. John Douglas in *The Anatomy of Motive* put it this way: "It's as if each of them is writing a novel about himself in which the final chapter is [his own] violent death."

I must credit another person here for some of his words—words that echo my own thoughts: journalist Jeffrey Kluger. If the entire human species were a single individual, that person long ago would have been declared mad. The insanity

would lie not in the anger and darkness of the human mind—though it can be a black and raging place indeed. And it certainly wouldn't lie in the goodness of that mind—one so sublime, we fold it into a larger place called "the soul". The madness would lie instead in the fact that both of these qualities—the savage and the splendid— can exist in one creature, one person, often in one instant.

We're a species that is capable of almost dumbfounding kindness. We nurse one another; romance one another; weep for one another. Ever since science taught us how, we willingly tear the very organs from our bodies and give them to one another. But at the same time, we slaughter one another.

The past 15 years of human history contain untold horrors: in Mogadishu, Rwanda, Chechnya, Baghdad, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, London, Madrid, Lebanon, Israel, New York City, Oklahoma City—at Columbine High School, at Virginia Tech, at Fort Hood, Texas, at Newtown, Connecticut, at the Boston Marathon—all of the crimes committed by the highest, wisest, most principled species

the planet has produced. That we're also the lowest, cruelest, most blood-drenched species is our shame—and our paradox.

What does, or ought to, separate us is our highly developed sense of morality, a primal understanding of good and bad, of right and wrong, of what it means to suffer not only our own pain—but also the pain of others. That quality is the essence of what it means to be human. Why it's an essence that so often spoils, no one can say.

But isn't there more to be considered here? What about other bizarre and outrageous behavior in our society: a *laissez faire* approach to star athletes with substance abuse habits; scandals at the highest levels of corporate America; corrupt politicians; the embarrassing peccadilloes of a former leader of the free world. In a sense, too free, in at least this part of it. And therein lies the rub.

It is a question of freedom—in the home, at school, in the church or synagogue, in the entertainment business. And a question of balance. Freedom must be paired with responsibility for without it, unbridled freedom becomes license. The dilemma then is to preserve freedom while

not allowing it to empower willy-nilly—to spawn those who would run amuck, or to foster the notion among some that they are above the law.

Lest readers conclude that an attempt is being made here to link all the above examples to a murderous mind, one need turn again to the experts who claim that future patterns of behavior are laid down in one's early formative years and can lead to varying mindsets carried through adolescence and on into adulthood. But the spoiled brat or corrupt politician or the athlete who craves more kicks than applause is not to be confused with a school sniper or an out-of-control Rambo. They are all products of early impressions, and why one veers down route A and another down route B is open to speculation. Yet one thing appears certain: the information children receive and absorb early on—from parents, teachers, preachers, and the like—may influence the route taken. And the information may range from casual remarks, through serious advice, to the behavior patterns of the grownups themselves. Or, if these and other authority figures shun or become shunned, for

whatever reasons, the child may eventually turn to peers similarly treated or, worse still, to angry gangs.

Maybe it all boils down to morality after all. One either has a high level of it, some of it, or none at all. Many experts believe that, among those who have it, it developed very early in childhood—that a child feels it intuitively.

But beyond that, are there anatomic or chemical differences in the brain? Is there such a thing as a "criminal mind"? Is someone born a potential murderer? These are the categories being studied the most nowadays, and scientists can't give an answer yet—but that hasn't stopped them from looking.

Brain scans are providing clues. Animal studies are providing more. None of this research may make us behave better; not right away at least. But all of it can help us understand ourselves—a small step up from savagery perhaps—but an important one, nevertheless.

# Chapter 6

In the early afternoon, the R.A.F. plane touched down at the Nice International Airport, covering a distance of 800 miles in about two hours. As before, their plane was dwarfed by the airliners of Air France, Alitalia, Virgin Express and American Airlines. Paul always enjoyed the region of France's Provence, north of Marseille, whether there for business or pleasure.

Ansel, their pilot, maneuvered the plane with ease, taxiing to an inconspicuous area while waving to some of the other pilots in their private cockpits. Since handling all of Paul's recent flights, he had begun to dress less casually, sporting a blue blazer and unbuttoned gray shirt.

"Have a question for both you buddies," he said, as if he'd known them for years. "Remember the name of

this little aircraft of ours?"

"Sure do," Paul replied. *Little Mongoose.*"

"Tiny but fast," Vincent added.

Ansel stayed behind as Vincent drove a rented car the remaining 20 miles to Gordes, the medieval village that formed the dangerous edge of Plateau de Vaucluse. Paul again reminded Vincent that its dry-stone bories had served the Resistance well during World War II and then apologized.

"For what?" Vincent asked.

"You've heard it all before. Twice. Leave it to me to complain about the prior's military sermons."

"Helps pass the time, Paul. Forget it."

The road reached a two-mile stretch that wound through gigantic rock formations and forests and eventually a valley embracing the Cistercian Abbey Notre-Dame-de-Senanque. Having seen it all before, only earlier in the year, neither commented on the October appearance of what was once the lavender hue, now beginning its dormancy until the following summer. Along about May, a purple hue would begin spreading through the fields of neatly arranged lavender and continue over miles of woodlands beyond.

As far as the eyes could see, thousands of gray-green plants lay dormant until the beginning of the next cycle. Yet both men agreed that remnants of the famous perfumed scent—real or imagined—lingered on.

At the parking grounds of the monastery, there was

shocking change. Shocking but impressive. They traveled over what was once compressed dirt and crushed stone and was now shiny asphalt with yellow markings that delineated parking spaces. Arrows directed cars through various offshoots that led to attractive brick buildings. The outside of the main building had been repaired and updated. And what had been large flat areas of weeds and debris were now tidy divisions of well-manicured grass and shrubs. Most were triangular or circular and contained statues of well-known saints. Several monks milled around, never looking up, reading what looked like bibles. Paul and Vincent had never before seen asphalt, extra buildings, grass, statues or monks in the area before.

Even the vestibule of the dome-topped main building was different. Bright and inviting. Newly installed windows allowed sunshine its freedom as it highlighted freshly painted light blue walls, darker blue carpeting, pictures of religious events, a water fountain, several cushioned chairs. And the area's musty odor had disappeared in favor of an uplifting flowery scent.

Upon entering, Frère Rudolph appeared at an opened inner door, signaling them in, while saying, "Ah, you made it, Paul and Vincent. I saw you pull in. The prior is anxious to see you once more." As the sub-prior, Rudolph was second in command at Senanque.

"Hello again," Paul said, "and what's going on here? With all the changes, I hardly recognized the place."

"Yes, it's quite dramatic, but it was to be expected by all concerned. You see, Dom is retiring on Tuesday and all the changes are those he's resisted making for several years now. Are they not impressive?"

"Indeed," Paul said. It was a word he seldom used but somehow seemed appropriate in that environment.

They were led to Dom's office. The prior was sitting in a corner of the nearly empty room, sipping tea. A book rested clumsily on his lap. A teakettle on a hotplate and an old radio were on a nearby small table. The radio was featuring soft funereal music. Gone were his desk, telephone, long tables and books stacked high to the ceiling.

He turned down the radio and had difficulty rising to shake their hands, but did and said, "Don't be too surprised, my friends. They're getting rid of me, as you can tell." His expression told a different story. "No, no--just joking. I've decided to retire within the next couple of days. Sixty years is long enough." His voice was still high pitched though soft, one you might predict would emerge from a feeble figure with ruffled white hair and pale, sunken cheeks.

"Well, thank goodness we came in time to wish you the best, Dom. And I hope we're not inconveniencing you."

"Not in the least. Please sit—both of you. I had these two chairs brought in. I'm happy to see you, and Leon says you'd like to run some things by me. But first, let

me thank and compliment you on that excellent email you sent. It dovetails nicely with my own thoughts on the subject. Thank you again."

He tugged down on a loose gray sweater and readjusted himself in his own chair. Gone also were his white collar and traditional lavender blouse tucked into black pants. But a large silver cross still hung from his neck.

"You're welcome and yes. I'll get right to Leon's point, and hope you'll be able to help as you always have in the past."

Paul took out a small rumpled pad and opened it to a page with a down-turned corner. He noted the prior produced one of his own. It appeared unused.

"Anyway," Paul began, "I'd like to get your take on my latest venture. I've again been retained by Leon Cassell—this time to locate a missing folder. As a result of that and without going into details—unless you want them— I have six particular subjects … issues … topics … I'm not sure what to call them … to pursue all at once. May I pass them before you?"

"Yes, of course. And may I write them down?"

Paul nodded. "I'll number them, one to six," he said, "and not necessarily in order of importance. They're scattered here and there."

Vincent's vacant look appeared to bother the prior who then said, "And you, Vincent … you may want to write them down, too."

"No need to, sir," Vincent responded, uncrossing his legs. "I have it all written up here." He tapped his head.

"Number one," Paul said. "Japan and the end of mankind. Number two: the creation of a master German race."

Dom wrote quickly, then looked up at Paul with tightened facial muscles. "My God, you're expected to get involved in these things—all because of a missing folder?"

"Unfortunately, that's how it's turned out. But there's more. Number three is the general subject of stem cell research and how its greater acceptance has influenced Switzerland's status as a financial hideaway. Number four involves Nazis and Vichy French people still living in Argentina. I won't go into Eva Perón's role in this connection."

Paul was tempted to look up to get the prior's reaction but was anxious to end the listing. "Number five," he said, "is the missing folder, and six, finally, is the recent murder of a Dr. Kesler in Seville. He's the former head of the stem cell department at Hollings General Hospital in the States. He was invited to lecture at a symposium but was slashed to death before he had the chance."

Paul sighed and, for some reason, didn't feel satisfied with the way his review turned out. He thus decided to end with, "And from here, Dom, I'm traveling to Buenos Aires, Germany, Switzerland and Japan."

The prior appeared a bit more animated in saying,

"Well done, Paul." He tugged on his sweater again.

"I'll have something to say about Evita, Hitler and Petain, but first let's take your six issues in reverse. Why that way? Because the last two you mentioned are the simplest to discuss."

"Makes sense." Paul said. What he didn't say, however, was that he recalled their last visit when the prior had railed against Hitler and Vichy France's Henri-Philippe Petain in terms not befitting a prior. Paul hoped the condemnation wouldn't last as long as last time.

As for Evita, he had no idea about Dom's opinion, one way or the other, although he did refer to her on his last visit. The reference was her role in allowing Nazis and Vichy French to live and flourish in Argentina. Paul wasted no time at all on the matter. Given the prior's unabashed feelings about Hitler and Petain, how could he not come down equally hard on Eva Perón?

The prior's face turned ruddy as he said, "So, let's begin. Number six: the murder of that doctor? I've already heard about it from some of my histarian friends in the Andalusian area. I've never seen the stem cell newsletter he puts out but they say that lately he'd gone into Swiss and Vichy French history and in one issue, he referred to the value of a master German race. It was number two on your list. Those would be good reasons for his elimination, according to some."

This kind of information and logic was the kind that Paul expected to hear on such short notice, the murder

occurring just a day or two before. But it *did* jibe with what he'd read in the sidebars.

"As for the missing folder issue—number five? Forget it. You may not know it, Paul, but in my capacity as senior histarian, I am considered the de facto head of the whole effort. I'm fed all sorts of information from histarians living and working in nearly every part of the globe. Some of the information sticks in my mind; some doesn't. This issue did. I know all about the missing carton with its many folders. And what intrigued me the most was that many were saying it was stolen from right under the noses of those in authority at the French Academy. Anyway, Parisian histarians tell me there never was a stolen folder per se."

Paul and Vincent looked at each other in disbelief, then stared at the prior and then back at each other as if forever.

"You mean," Paul finally said, "that I'm searching for something that doesn't exist?"

"I'm afraid so … but if it did exist, it would probably deal with stem cells anyway. That's my guess."

The prior apparently understood their dismay and continued: "Many times one is given a problem to solve and it turns out not to be one after all. But within the process, other definite ones are brought to the surface, as has happened here. I call this my "*Inclusion by Exclusion Phenomenon*".

Paul hardly heard what Dom just said because he

hardly listened. He was more intent on digesting the news about the missing folder. And the prior's subtle referral to stem cells.

Without being subtle himself, he said, "Dom, let me ask you what you think about stem cell research, because that's really the subject of all the studies in the folders."

"I'm in favor of all progressive studies," Dom replied, "but as I said before, I'm more disturbed that folders were allowed to be stolen, more than I am about the information they contained."

He opened his top desk drawer and shuffled through a bunch of papers until he found the one he sought. "My only trip to your country, my friends, was back about two years ago. Remember?"

"Yes, I most certainly do," Paul said. "You were invited by Dr. Kater Weld, the Director of our Brent Institute. He wanted you to hear a lecture he was giving at a symposium there. I may be getting it all wrong but hadn't you met somewhere and didn't you tell him you were putting together a paper dealing with the religious side of illnesses—I believe you called it—and you'd read that he believed more attention should be paid to that than to the illnesses themselves? To a certain extent, at least?"

"Correct. So I went and he was a wonderful host. He gave me part of his lecture and I have it here. Would you like to hear it? It's not long. The ending is what I'm most concerned about."

"Yes, go right ahead.

*My judgment is that far too much attention continues to be paid to those clinical entities that scientists have researched for years. Studies have been repeated over and over, ones on the east coast of this country duplicating those on the west coast—or those from our country almost carbon copies of those from Great Britain or Germany or France or Italy. I have in mind illnesses like heart disease, stroke, cancer, arthritis. To a lesser extent, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.*

*It is my firm conviction that a moratorium should be called on all grant monies dedicated for research on a specified list of diseases to be determined by an impartial group of specialists. The monies saved, however, should not then be redirected to the study of other diseases or other causes but rather should be used to compensate a pool of dedicated, skilled individuals to pore over all the medical literature accumulated in all the great libraries of the world. Collate the material, take advantage of computer help, and make some sense out of it all. This is not*

*to say there should never be a return to an analysis of those specific topics, but let us pause, catch our breath, step back and interpret what the scientific body politic has amassed.*

*Perhaps by arranging fragments of knowledge in the correct order—as we did with the human genome—there may be more complete answers. Who knows until we look? And let us not forget the religious aspects of all this. Prayer. Thanking God for progress and the like.*

Paul had heard Dr. Weld deliver the same remarks during several of his other lectures. In fact, Paul himself had used nearly the same words in some of his own lectures after receiving permission from Dr. Weld to do so. But Paul didn't mention it to the prior.

There was a knock on the door. Frère Rudolph stuck his head in, apologized for intruding and said, "They just called from the Sangraal Assisted Living Complex. You're all set for at least a year there, Dom. The companies you're donating your books, furniture and writings to are willing to finance your stay there." The sub-prior didn't wait for a response.

For a full 30 seconds, neither the prior nor the others broke the silence. Paul and Vincent had lowered their heads.

Finally, Paul straightened up and said to Dom: "That was a good reading. But regarding the so-called missing folder, I have a statement and a question. If you weren't who you are and if Rudolph hadn't dropped by, I'd still be cursing. And second, should I tell Leon about what you've said about the folder?"

"Go ahead and curse if it helps, but I'd hold off on telling Leon about the folder in question. It would only muddy the waters at this stage and might work negatively on the other issues you're tackling. It'll keep and will probably become apparent on its own."

"But what if he asks about it?"

Without hesitation, Dom said, "Tell him to bug off––is that how it's said?— because it's an issue that needs more study. And because that's such a vague answer, you won't be lying."

Paul thought the "bug off" expression was totally out of character—and he almost informed Dom about it.

"Now to carry on," the prior said, glancing at his note pad, "if we look at the rest of your list, number two, three and four can be excluded in favor of number one. In other words, we can conclude that while many might be concerned about a German super race; Switzerland stem cell research and its history as a monetary hideaway; and the Nazis and Vichy French in Argentina—all of it doesn't make any difference in the long run if Japan succeeds in its goal."

"In other words, there's no 'end of the world' if stem

cells, Germany, Switzerland, or Argentinean residents continue as part of center stage?" Paul asked. He felt disgusted but was emphatic.

"You've got it. If certain factions in Japan get their way, it's 'Good bye, one and all'. The other things no longer count."

"So," Paul said, "What do I ... we ... do?"

"Continue on and mollify things as best you can until Japan conclusively fails or conclusively succeeds. Wish I'd be around to see how things develop."

By this time, Paul had loosened his tie and rolled up his sleeves. "That 'mollify' word bothers me. You mean what?"

"Let things run their course on their own."

Paul checked his watch, making sure the prior noticed.

"Dom," he said, "we'd better be going. You've been most helpful." As he spoke, he tried to identify what he'd learned from the meeting. Foremost, he thought, was the prior's opinion that no folder was missing.

"As you wish. I've certainly enjoyed your company. But two things remain. First is the trio of Evita, Petain and Hitler and second is an updated version of my view of dreadful world events."

"Yes," Paul said, "do go ahead."

"Regarding that trio: Very simply, I believe that Evita was a prostitute to many important people; Petain was a prostitute to Hitler; and Hitler was a prostitute to

the devil. Regarding prostitution in general, did you know that perceptions of it are based on culturally determined values that differ among nations? In Europe during the Middle Ages, for example, church leaders attempted to rehabilitate penitent prostitutes and fund their dowries. Nevertheless, prostitution flourished. It was not only tolerated but also protected, licensed, and regulated by law. It also constituted a considerable source of public revenue. Public brothels were established in large cities throughout Europe. At Toulouse here in France, the profits were shared between the city and the university. In England, bordellos were originally licensed by the bishops of Winchester and soon after, by Parliament."

Now I know he's losing it, Paul thought.

But he said, "Well put, Dom." He wanted to contribute his own two cents to the matter but realized that Dom's upcoming commentary would eat up valuable time. "And your view of world events?"

"Yes, by all means. Probably the last time I'll be able to give it—and I thank you for the opportunity. You've heard most of it, I know, but things have grown even worse and … "

Paul interrupted. "…but we'd like to hear it again."

The prior cleared his throat, turned off the radio and began.

I've read the importance of the Stone
Age through developments in ancient Egypt

and in the civilizations of Mesopotamia and Sumaria and Babylonia; in the battles of the Hittites and the Persians and the Assyrians; through the glory of Greece and the grandeur of Rome, as they say; and on into the Middle Ages.

And I've read and reread the sad details of terrible wars—revolutionary, civil, worldwide; the rise and fall of Hitler and Stalin dictatorships in Europe; anti-colonial sentiment in Africa and Asia; flaming battles for independence in Kenya, Algeria, Angola and Rhodesia; the Mao Tse-tung cultural revolution in China; Israel's six-day war in Egypt; internal turmoil in Russia, Nicaragua and the Philippines; skirmishes in the Falklands and Granada and Northern Ireland; ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia; the rise of terrorism and the 9/11 attacks; Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Thailand, Pakistan, South Sudan, Tunisia, the Central African Republic, Syria.

And now, the whole issue of Islamic Fundamentalists—you know: the extremists.

The prior's breathing was shallow and he had turned

pale. "That's enough," he murmured.

Throughout it all, Paul maintained a studious face, as did Vincent. But Paul wanted to end on a humorous note and said, "You forgot Mozambique."

Dom thought a moment, smiled thinly and said, "You ***were*** paying attention, weren't you?"

Handshakes, hugs and best wishes followed. Then Paul led the way out.

At the car, Paul brought up Germany, Switzerland, Argentina and Japan, referring to them as the "quartet".

"I was hoping to hear more about them," he said. Privately, he was willing to accept the idea about the missing folder but he was not convinced that the countries should be ignored.

"I could tell," Vincent replied. "But his opinion on there being no missing folder was worth the trip, I think."

"I agree," Paul said, "if it's absolutely true. He did stress, however, that it was the opinion of all the histarians in the vicinity of Paris. But he never mentioned any histarian support regarding the quartet.

"Also, I didn't like it, but I sensed that a mild degree of dementia has set in since our last visit. So, all in all, let's go along with his opinion about the folder but not about the countries. Meaning we carry on with our planned visits. Do you agree?"

"Yes, with everything he didn't back up with histarian support," Vincent replied. "I also agree with the dementia bit, and you know," he said, starting up the car,

"I'm confused. As the leader of the histarians, he gets to hear about everything any single histarian learns?"

"Yeah, but it's broader than that. All the histarians can share information among each other. They're like a Yale secret society. And speaking of 'secret', I'm really not in favor of withholding Dom's opinion about the missing folder from Leon."

"Meaning you think there **is** one missing?"

"Not so much that as keeping information from Leon, as the prior suggests."

# Chapter 7

R.A.F. travel time to Buenos Aires was expected to be more than ten hours, which included a quick stopover in Mauratania. It was a sticky muggy day and on the taxi ride to the airstrip where he expected the plane to be waiting, he kept his window down, and at several street corners, he heard cries of, "Check on Eva Perón! Check on Eva Perón!"

How many knew of his presence there in Provence? Who knew where he was presently headed? Other than Captain Gomez, who anticipated his arrival in Argentina? No matter, he had a long flight ahead and a plan to fill it.

He felt the city was, in a way, waiting for him, for whenever he thought of Buenos Aires, he thought of his most recent visit there—not four weeks before—when

he had to leave in a hurry in connection with his last investigation. But he knew he'd return again, maybe not for professional reasons, but simply because he liked the largest city in Argentina—the funnel-shaped bay called the Rio de la Plata, the broad avenues, the numerous parks and plazas, the Plaza de Mayo, the Pink House (which is the equivalent of Washington's White House), the many museums and libraries, and the many people he'd met in such a short time.

Normally, Paul disliked plane trips, but this time he looked forward to having a chance to consider and reconsider what had occurred during the previous few days. Usually on long flights, he did more thinking than reading but this would be an exception. He had taken some materials along to read and figured he'd start there, for they would provide more information to think about. Ever the classifier, he branded the activities as "current essentials" and "background reading".

Since his destination was Buenos Aires, he would start with an article he'd downloaded from *consortiumnews.com*. Written by George Hodel in 1999, it was titled *Evita, Swiss & the Nazis*. Having recently dwelled on Eva Perón's personal artifacts in a conversation with his longtime friend, Captain Joe Gomez of the city's Metropolitan Police, he had read through the article fairly recently—two months ago— but now wanted to brush up on key parts of it, those that pertained to his current case. The article furthermore included the Swiss and the

Nazis, subjects he'd paid little attention to before. Even Switzerland was mentioned.

And he planned on reading a second article, *The Horrifying American Roots of Nazi Eugenics*, written by Edwin Black for the *History News Network* in 2003. The rest of the time would be spent on the "current essentials" and, possibly, a bit on napping.

In most of his background readings, he would skim over what he judged to be irrelevant material, or would disregard it entirely. Forgetting on purpose. His rationale was that it interfered with his understanding and retention of what he deemed essential. He extracted the following from the Evita article:

> On June 6, 1947, Argentina's first lady Eva Perón left for a glittering tour of Europe. The glamorous ex-actress was feted in Spain, kissed the ring of Pope Pius XII at the Vatican and hobnobbed with the rich-and-famous in the mountains of Switzerland.
>
> Eva Perón, known as "Evita" by her adoring followers, was superficially on a trip to strengthen diplomatic, business and cultural ties between Argentina and important leaders of Europe. But there was a parallel mission behind the high-profile trip, one that has contributed to a

half century of violent extremism in Latin America.

According to records now emerging from Swiss archives and the investigations of Nazi hunters, an unpublicized side of Evita's world tour was coordinating the network for helping Nazis relocate in Argentina. This new evidence of Evita's cozy ties with prominent Nazis corroborates the long-held suspicion that she and her husband, Gen. Juan Perón, laid the groundwork for a bloody resurgence of fascism across Latin America in the 1970s and 80s.

Besides blemishing the Evita legend, the evidence threatens to inflict more damage on Switzerland's image for plucky neutrality. The international banking center is still staggering from disclosures about its wartime collaboration with Adolph Hitler and Swiss profiteering off his Jewish victims. The archival records indicate that Switzerland's assistance to Hitler's henchmen didn't stop with the collapse of the Third Reich.

And the old Swiss-Argentine-Nazi connection reaches to the present in another way. Spanish "superjudge"

Baltazar is seeking to open other Swiss records on bank accounts controlled by Argentine military officers who led the so-called "Dirty War" that killed and ... (made disappear) ... tens of thousands of Argentines between 1976 and 1983.

During World War II, General Perón--a populist military leader— made no secret of his sympathies for Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany.

Even as the Third Reich crumbled in the spring of 1945, Perón remained a pro-fascist stalwart, making available more than 1,000 blank passports for Nazi collaborators fleeing Europe.

With Europe in chaos and the Allies near victory, tens of thousands of ranking Nazis dropped out of sight, tried to mix in with common refugees and began plotting escapes from Europe to Argentina across clandestine "ratlines".

By 1946, the first wave of defeated fascists was settling into new Argentine homes. The country also was rife with rumors that the thankful Nazis had begun to repay Perón by bankrolling his campaign for the presidency, which he won with his stunning wife at his side.

In 1947, Perón was living in Argentina's presidential palace and was hearing pleas from thousands of other Nazis desperate to flee Europe. The stage was set for one of the most troubling boatlifts in human history.

The archival records reveal that Eva Perón stepped forward to serve as Gen. Perón's personal emissary to this Nazi underground. Already, Evita was an Argentine legend.

Born in 1919 as an illegitimate child, she became a prostitute to survive and to get acting roles. As she climbed the social ladder, lover by lover, she built up deep resentments toward the traditional elites.

As a mistress to other army officers, Evita fashioned herself as the "queen of the poor", the protector of those she called "mis descamisados"—"my shirtless ones". She created a foundation to help the poor buy items from toys to houses.

But her charity extended, too, to her husband's Nazi allies.

Had Paul read enough of the Evita article for now? It simply wasn't the number of words he'd covered, but the ideas they conveyed that convinced him to postpone

its further reading plus the Nazi Eugenics article until he was flying back to the United States. Or perhaps he would wait until he arrived there. In effect, everything written had seemed so convincing, so striking that it bore into him like a steel pike. He had been reading furiously in terms of both speed and emotion before deciding to take time off, and was shocked that the article dealt with not only Argentina but also Switzerland and Germany, countries he'd once planned on visiting but he wasn't certain about doing so after all.

Thus ambivalent, he turned to one of his many internal monologues, one consisting of stem cells, Swiss banking, the Nazis, the Jews and eugenics. For some reason, he disliked the latter term, preferring to break it down to its basic meaning—"master race"— so from here on in, that's how he would think of it.

And once again, he evoked what David had told him about Japan's master race plan. He did so superficially, however, for this very internal monologue, these very subjects, this very plane flight all funneled into a decision to ask David to share more fully in the day-to-day activities of the investigation as a whole. He had come to terms with the fact that there was so much productive overlap in their last several cases, that it would be best if they met or, minimally, conversed every day or two. Some traveling might also be shared and, if so, the fact they both resided in Connecticut eliminated any logistical problems for R.A.F. pilots. Paul even took

into consideration the excellent relationship between his Sylvie and David's Kathy.

All in all, it would be a bold move in what had become a bold case that had been enveloped by many unforeseen facets. *It had mushroomed from a single charge to a conglomerate.*

Running it all through his mind once again, he was certain that Leon would concur with a carefully structured arrangement. And it included Paul's willingness to divide any financial compensation with David on a mutually acceptable basis.

Paul felt he'd plowed through enough deliberation and having reached the point where the pros far outweighed the cons, he phoned David.

He was met with total and exuberant approval. "The timing is perfect, Paul. I happen to be between cases and the zoo board wouldn't care if I missed some meetings."

"Great! More than great. Let's meet when I get back from Argentina. We haven't the time to dole out responsibilities, so to speak. We'll just learn how to handle it all as we go along. That make sense?"

"Perfect," David replied. "But do understand: you're still in charge."

"I suppose that's the way it should be, but being in charge doesn't mean I order you around."

"Hmm, sometimes I *need* ordering," David said without missing a beat. "One other thing, Paul. I think

I've been as familiar with your cases as you've probably been with mine—and I think that's a plus as far as our operation would go."

"Excellent point."

It was a two-word comment that both ended their conversation—after a reiteration they would meet when Paul returned to the States—and also characterized how Paul now viewed this Argentine visit. For lingering in his subconscious had been the notion he might have avoided the trip entirely and instead relied on phone calls. But now, with David aboard in terms of subject matter, he would be able to handle the traveling, the firsthand discoveries … hopefully valuable… and the interpretation of them after consultation with fellow treasure hunter David, once he returned home. And there was also the opportunity to phone him if need be.

Paul ran through a list of what he planned to accomplish:

> (1) Immediately contact Captain Joe Gomez. Get his take on stem cell research and on the meshing, if any, among Nazis, Jews and any Vichy French currently living in Buenos Aires. I'll probably bring the subjects up but don't expect to learn much from the captain about Dr. Kesler's murder, certain Japanese intentions, the creation of a German super race, sarin nerve gas, inhaled arsenic or the

end of mankind.

(2) Interview Cristina de la Fuente, the mentally incompetent and unpredictable woman who had supplied the ornate dagger to the killer of Connecticut's governor and who might indicate what happened to the dagger's mate. This would involve a visit to the El Borda Psychiatric Hospital. Still vivid in my mind is that just four weeks before, I'd spent time in the Argentine capital speaking with her about the Peróns and Eva's predilection for preserving any artifacts related to her and her family. But she had denied knowing a thing about the matching dagger.

(3) Without mentioning the 94-year-old Vichy Frenchman, gathering information about whether or not former Jewish money is hidden in Switzerland and, if so, is intended for later use in more advanced stem cell research. This, combined with Swiss offspring possibly using such money as future bargaining chips.

(4) Respecting the prior's advice (supported by histarian input), forget the single missing folder issue. But inquire around regarding the missing SCC—the heavy cabinet.

All of this was a tall order, made taller by Paul's plan to spend no more than a day in the city. Before napping, he

read through articles by Mary Lane and Andrew Browne in the *Wall Street Journal* that spoke of Nazis looting German art and of Japan's apologizing for past behavior patterns. Paul was well aware of Japan's official media release that it was fed up with having to act like a "good loser". In fact, an article he read alluded to the country's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe wanting to remove what he and other Japanese call a postwar stigma. Abe contended it makes a vanquished nation more vanquished even though the war is over.

But with South Korea and China in mind, many countries counter with the blanket statement that Japan's ruthlessness simply cannot be dismissed: 20 million lives in Asia and 15 million in China. Whenever Paul thought of these facts, he would ask himself if it's any wonder that scores of nations have failed to sympathize with Japan on many fronts. Soon to be given the opportunity, it was an issue he planned to address once he reached Tokyo, but he was uncertain how.

These, combined with reported allegations of banking irregularities in Switzerland removed all doubt about his final itinerary: Germany, Switzerland and Japan. Only something colossal in the next 48 hours would change his mind.

Once the R.A.F. plane landed at an airstrip within walking distance of the Ezeiza International Airport, he made arrangements with the pilots to return there late the next day, Saturday. If there were a change of plans,

they would be notified by Leon. As was their custom—they were the same two pilots always assigned to Paul—the three of them exchanged jokes. It was a pleasant interlude that he looked forward to, for it was a time to laugh hard while temporarily blotting out the serious and complicated issues he was facing. He'd been saving up a dirty joke he could never have told Sylvie, or even Leon, but he had little difficulty revealing its sordid details to the pilots.

Both roared and even clapped, and upon settling down, one said, "I can't match **that**." The other chimed in with "I can't either." Vincent laughed too, although he had heard it before—at least twice.

"Ditto," he said.

Such comments served to lighten things more than Paul had expected.

As before, Vincent offered to register at the nearest hotel while Paul made his way toward the air terminal where he expected to phone the captain. It was nearing eleven p.m. and he walked slowly while carrying his usual luggage, satchel and laptop. A narrow deteriorating pier loomed ahead of him—long, poorly lit, with clear, calm water on one side and a metal fence on the other. In contrast, the water on the other side of the fence was filthy and swishing. Within a few minutes, he was about to pass an open gate in the fence when several men, slugging down beers, all bore into him, nearly plunging him into the dirty water had he not dropped his luggage and

grabbed onto one of the gate's frame posts. He reached for a pistol, having forgotten that he'd been forbidden to carry one while flying. But the men hurried on.

He couldn't help but be reminded of a similar incident not too long ago. But it was more calculated on the part of the drunken men involved and began in a hotel on the island of St. Helena. He had gone there as part of the investigation of Napoleon's death nearly 200 years before. Paul thought it odd if not astonishing that those four men were all Japanese and that he'd be traveling to Japan within a day or two.

What happened was that one of them grabbed hold of his arm from behind while the other three shoved him forward out a side door of the hotel. All four managed to sip from small bottles otherwise tucked under their belts. He remembered the darkness that greeted them, the yapping of a nearby dog and especially the stench of old garbage. They threw him to the ground, covered his mouth with duct tape and tied his wrists behind him. He felt as though all the air had been sucked out of his lungs.

They yanked him up, each man as forceful as the next, and led him toward a metal railing below which a restless, roaring sea slapped against the rocks. He recalled realizing what they were up to and, with fears coalescing into terror, all he could think of doing was to feign fatigue. He fell to the ground but they dragged him a full 100 yards more. At a dip in the railing, they raised him high over their heads, tossed him into the sea and took off, laughing and sipping in harmony.

Though weakened, Paul immediately put his legs in motion with a kick that brought back memories of the pool at Yale's Payne Whitney Gym. It was like pushing a cloud but at least it kept him afloat and soon he was able to twist around to his back and to float while he caught his bearings. All he could do was to force himself to breathe calmly through his nose.

Spying a ladder not too far ahead, he inched along and maneuvered his chin and knees to elevate himself until his feet reached a rung just below water level. The rest was easy by comparison and once on land, he staggered along the railing until

he found a split in it. There, he was able to use one of its sharp edges to free his hands. Then he ripped the tape from his mouth and his breathing came back to normal, interspersed with deep sighs of relief.

By that time—and bodily function aside— his thinking had been strained, like neon woven into thought. The rest of the night was a blur except for feeling Sylvie dabbing some cuts on his chin as he stumbled on his words.

Soon he arrived at what constitutes the actual port of Buenos Aires where scores of dockworkers were loading sacks of corn aboard a cargo ship. Most sacks were suspended from tall machines that swayed and swerved. One of the workers, no doubt a supervisor, held up his arm, giving Paul permission to pass by. Suddenly the lights dimmed and a harsh horn sounded. It was "quitting time." All sacks slowly lowered. Except one. It dropped at full tilt, landing not six feet from Paul who hadn't been able to decide which way to dive. He was not hit and was helped up by the supervisor who offered his apology.

No other words were spoken and Paul rushed ahead, thinking: "Uh-oh, here we go again. Twice more."

He phoned the captain and they agreed to meet at his office at ten in the morning. Paul hinted at what he wanted to learn and the captain seemed to offer a

substantial dose of encouragement, enough at least for Paul to get a good night's sleep at the hotel.

Just before retiring in the room they shared, Vincent said he thought it wise they'd decided to start their travels in the Paris of South America. He predicted that the meeting with the captain would not be very fruitful, but that the one at the hospital and the issue of money hidden in Switzerland—courtesy of the old Vichy Frenchman—would prove to be the opposite.

Paul expressed some unintelligible doubts and then, barely audible, said he thought it was Shakespeare who said, "Sleep is Nature's soft nurse. And I say, 'good night, my friend'."

# Chapter 8

Old friend Police Captain Joe Gomez was in full uniform with gold and silver badges across his breast, a gun holstered at his right hip and black shoes whose shine irritated one's eyes.

"We meet again," Paul said. Alone, he was dressed in a green shirt with khaki pants and brown shoes. No jacket. Vincent had agreed to forego the meeting but would accompany them for the one at the psychiatric hospital later on.

"Did you ever leave?" Gomez said. "You haven't changed much in three weeks."

The captain, appearing more North than South American, was tall and straight-backed with green eyes and blond hair. He was clean-shaven and bore no accent.

They sat in straight chairs near a set of windows that filtered early morning sunlight across Paul's upper body. "Unless there's one at your ankle, I can tell you have no gun," Gomez said. "Would you like one while you're here?"

"Yeah, I feel incomplete … nude … without one."

Gomez went to his desk, opened a bottom drawer, and returned with a small pistol he handed Paul. "This won't show at all in your side pocket," he said.

"So you *do* remember I've been accosted at hospitals before. And why? Who knows? But thanks," Paul said. "I'll return it after we finish at El Borda. Which reminds me: I'm on a helluva tight schedule so I won't be here long. Then it's off to Germany, Switzerland and Japan."

"Forget the thanks. You've done the same thing for me on each of my trips to the States. Damn those airplanes."

"Count me in on that," Paul said.

The captain returned to Paul's schedule. "So it's three more countries in a row. Man! Won't that be tiring?"

"Yes, if I don't accomplish much. No, if I do."

After pouring two cups of coffee, Gomez said, "After our call last night, I jotted down some things." He unfolded a sheet of paper he took from his shirt pocket.

"About stem cell research in these parts, there's not much I know about it except that the ban has been lifted and the scientists I know—and there aren't that many—

are as happy as a Rufous Hornero."

"What's that?"

"The national bird of Argentina."

Paul looked around the room before asking, "Are they horny?"

"Paul!"

"Sorry, I couldn't resist." Paul wished he had some crackers to chew on. "Anyway, that's that. What's next on your list?"

"Nazis, Jews and another group living here. I didn't catch what you said."

"Vichy French."

"Yes, Vichy French. The best I can offer you, Paul, is to say there are plenty here, but they cause no trouble."

"Would you say they live high off the hog?"

"What's that mean?"

"Sorry. Are they well off—expensive homes and cars and so forth?"

"Yes, come to think of it. But they're also very generous. Give a lot to charitable causes."

Thus far, Paul was disappointed with what he had learned so decided to act the role of both teacher and questioner. He gave a quick assessment of the three factions during the World War—the plundering by Nazis under Hitler and his henchmen; the millions of Jews who were being slaughtered; the Vichy French who had turned into Nazi allies.

Then he inquired: "Have you noticed any Nazi or

Vichy French animosity toward the Jews here?"

"No, not at all. They've adapted, conformed ... however you want to put it."

"How about toward each other?"

"Same thing. They get along."

"Okay then, Joe, I wasn't going to bring this up because there's some question about a folder that I thought existed but apparently doesn't. It sounds wacky, I know, but if it does—I mean 'exist'—there might be information in it that says an old Nazi commander lives here. And that he organized the death of thousands of Jews and no doubt arranged to have their money and possessions hidden safely in Switzerland."

Gomez remained motionless—and silent. It was when the sunlight reached Paul's chin that the captain rose and lowered the shades.

"But as awful as that sounds, it isn't the point I want to make. The point involves stem cell research. If the Nazis did do so—that is kill, kill, kill—then one could rationalize that any such research was, or is, being financed by those dead German Jews.

And taking it a final step: if that's the case, then maybe their descendents who settled here might claim the money is legally theirs if it's derived from any eventual benefits of stem cell research. At least it's a possibility."

Paul paused to evaluate the captain's facial response and, seeing not much to dwell on, said, "I know it sounds complicated, Joe, and it's probably not even fair to bring

it up, but does what I just said make sense?"

"Yes and I agree it's a possibility, but I'm afraid I can't help you there. I'm sure there's more than one German commander living here now. And to my knowledge, no one like that has caused any problems. But I'll keep my eyes and ears open and let you know if anything suspicious comes up. Certainly makes sense though."

Paul scratched his head and said, "Let's see ... one more thing about all that ... yeah, that's it: Swiss offspring could even use that money as future bargaining chips. You know, I'm sure, that they're in some trouble over there for accepting and safekeeping money over the years. From individuals, institutions, corporations all over the world. All nationalities. But from what I hear—and I'm no expert on this—they're now paying the price."

This time, Gomez slowly shook his head sideways--in disbelief.

"But that's enough about that," Paul said.

Anxious to proceed with his main Argentine mission— interviewing the mentally disturbed Cristina de la Fuente—he decided not to bring up anything more about Germany nor to introduce the subjects of Japan or the missing heavy carton.

The El Borda Psychiatric Hospital was an enormous collection of buildings that appeared to have more

entrance doors than windows. Paul commented on it.

"It's as if they're making a statement." Gomez said as they walked through one ... "Hey folks ... look, we're here and available to you. Some days I think all our residents deserve some time here. Even me."

The captain knew most of the personnel at a large counter that ran the width of the far wall and asked if they might visit with Cristina de la Fuente.

"Just a few simple questions," he said.

Arrangements were made for the three of them to meet in a nearby room. An attendant remained outside the closed door. The room contained only a maroon cushy sofa, four matching chairs and a triangular table with a vase of imitation flowers. Its walls were painted pastel brown as was the ceiling. The lighting was subdued but not so much that Paul couldn't notice how the woman had changed in just four weeks—for the worse.

Before sitting, both Gomez and Paul smiled broadly as they extended their hands to Christina. Instead of reciprocating, she said, "Well if it isn't the fancy detective from up north and the big time captain from down south."

Neither responded.

Paul thought it best to assume she was simply joking and asked if she was getting good care.

"Care?" she shouted. "What's that?"

She was dressed in a striped robe over a dress whose stripes ran in the opposite direction. Her hair was

disheveled and she wore no makeup. All in all, she didn't come close to the appearance of the beautiful woman he remembered. And he didn't recall her ever being grouchy even when she showed anger.

Paul, disgruntled, rapidly decided he'd bring up just a single subject before he would thank her for her time, rise and lead the captain out of the room, out of the hospital.

"May I ask, Cristina," he began, "do you know if that ornate dagger implicated in the Connecticut governor's murder had a mate? And if so, where it is?"

"Ah, the dagger," she replied. "Everyone wants to know about the dagger. Well, you asked and I'll answer. I never saw a dagger in the first place, so how would I know what its mate would look like? The answer is 'no'. And if the answer was 'yes', do you think I'd tell you? Do you hear what I'm sayin'? The answer is still 'no'."

Paul was briefly inclined to ask 'why not'. Instead, he forced a different response. "I see," he said and asked Gomez if he had any questions before they left. He received another lateral headshake and they left, after faking a decent farewell.

In the captain's car, he said, "You're not learning much on this visit, Paul. Sorry about that."

"That's the way it goes sometimes, Joe. Whew, what a bitch."

In his investigative work, Paul was more than accustomed to receiving negative answers for an entire

day, an entire week. He considered them all as a negative aggregation but a "positive reality". Yet, he was still disappointed and, before leaving Buenos Aires, he was determined to bring up some subjects that would undoubtedly bear little fruit.

So far, he felt as though he was on a south-of-the-border goose chase. Once again, he swore that in any future assignments, he would stick with what he was hired for. Say an ancient family relic had disappeared. Just find the relic, that's all. If he comes across a murder, let the police handle it. If he meets a gorgeous blonde at a bar, just make conversation and maybe pick up the tab; that's all. If a psychotic woman enters the picture, stay away from her.

It was past noon and had begun to rain. "Care for some lunch?" the captain asked. "This'll blow over before we finish."

"Yeah, let's stop somewhere."

They pulled into a small restaurant, a block from police headquarters. The main room was cramped but Gomez got a signal from a longtime waitress that his favorite table in an adjoining room was available. They entered the empty room and despite subdued lighting and a small rain leak in one corner, Paul expressed his approval and had already made up his mind to share some thoughts about the Dr. Kesler murder. Meanwhile they ordered BLT sandwiches.

"Joe, just a thing or two about the murder of a Dr.

Kesler in Seville."

"Kesler?" the captain asked.

"Yeah, Dr. Albert Kesler."

"That's the guy! We had an Albert Kesler who was run out of here … oh, about two years ago … because he was writing some controversial articles for *La Nacion*—our main newspaper."

"I can't believe it!" Paul blurted and slid his chair closer to the table. "How many Albert Kesler's can there be? Was he a scientist?"

"Yes, at the UBA—the Universidad de Buenos Aires. They finally let him go, but only after crowds gathered twice a week—the days the articles came out—on the grounds outside his office. They would scream for him to be fired. This lasted for at least a month, and the people won out. His life was even threatened and when he heard about it, he suddenly disappeared."

"What would he write about?"

"Usually political stuff, especially about Germany and Japan."

"Japan? Like what?"

"I remember reading the article myself. He claimed that Japan felt sorry about fighting your country, but that they had no choice. I forget the reason they gave."

"That's a lot of crap. Remember Pearl Harbor?"

"Of course."

The waitress brought them their sandwiches. Gomez wolfed his down and Paul barely touched his. He was

thinking too hard.

"Really, Joe," he said. "I can't believe it. How often do you hear of a guy who's forced out of here, gets an important job at a Connecticut hospital ... **mine** ... is invited to speak at an important symposium in Spain ... but gets murdered?"

The captain didn't flinch, show any facial expression or hesitate. "Never," he said.

"Is there a sizable contingent of Japanese here?"

"Very few, I'd say."

"Christ, it's weird. Just plain weird. And I know I'm thinking out loud but they say he owned a cottage in Germany. I'll bet he beat it to there after being kicked out of here."

"I agree," Gomez said.

Once again, Eva Perón eased into Paul's mind. The mention of Japanese brought it on. As far as he knew, she never went out of her way to encourage them to settle in Argentina. Like a recurring nightmare, she continued to be a consideration that frequently popped up, sometimes prompted by the slightest impulse. The entire Evita saga began years and years ago, starting with the collapse of the Third Reich and continuing on through her husband's reign, but somehow Paul felt it bore directly on the present: why he was hired again by *Gens de Vérité*; why all the travel; why another strange murder; why the apparent attempts to scare him away; and, particularly, what the future held. He would plow

ahead though, raise questions of both significant and perhaps insignificant value. He would collect and store all he could and surrender no ground.

Nor did he care about the use of foul language when called for—or abruptly changing the subject when called for. "You know," he said, "that Christina really pissed me off. I think it's important to determine if both daggers matched."

The captain didn't seem phased by the sudden subject change, as if he were used to it.

"Why's that?" he asked.

"Because it might show if the one who used it on Kesler came from down here."

"It probably did. But don't forget, we're a complete mix now: native Argentines, Nazis, Swiss, Germans, Vichy French. Evita and her pals let it happen. Sorry. Let's say, '*made*' it happen."

Paul finally took a bite of his sandwich but chewed deliberately. "I know you weren't around at the time, Joe, but what's your view of her rise to power?"

To a degree, Paul was desperate and was again searching for the smallest morsel of new information.

"My view? **Prostitute**. It got her where she got and she wasn't ashamed of it. And probably had a good time in the process." Gomez's smile smacked of carnality.

They wound up the visit with some small talk, with Paul's returning the gun, and with a promise to keep in touch.

At the airport, Paul went to an isolated corner, took out his smartphone and notified David and Leon about what had transpired. Their reactions mirrored one another: Little surprise regarding the crazy lady and just the reverse regarding what had been discovered about Dr. Kesler. Their final point of agreement was for Paul to contact them upon leaving each of the next three countries—or sooner if he thought they might help. Then they would convene upon his return to the States … David in person and Leon by phone.

"What … a day in each country?" David asked.

"At the most," Paul replied. "Probably couldn't survive more than that."

He reconsidered. "No, forget my last statement. I'll be just fine. But let me say this: let's work it both ways. If you find out anything important, call me."

In the conversation with Leon, Paul said, "Here's how we'll handle the histarian part of it. For the three countries, we have to consider: what histarian I'm to consult and where and when we should meet. I'm afraid the greatest burden regarding all this rests with you, Leon, but at least I've already taken care of Germany. I have an histarian friend in Hamburg I've already called … Karl Heller … gave him the gist of the problem, when I'll arrive, and so on. We worked well together one other time."

"Where will you meet him?"

"At the main railway station: the Hauptbahnhof."

"And you'll confer right there?"

"Right there. Then if need be, we'll travel to wherever he recommends. There's a Mariott right in the center of town, so we can go there."

"A coherent plan, Paul, and I'll be sure to follow through for the other two countries."

Paul didn't respond but believed he'd had enough of Argentina and probably would not visit there again.

# Chapter 9

On the flight to Germany, Paul's smartphone rang an hour after takeoff. So soon?

It was David calling. "You know that hotel clerk? Donald something-or-other?"

"Donald Durand."

"Yes. He was found dead."

"Dead? Not injured, but dead?"

"The Civil Guard found his body in a dumpster near his home. They got some kind of a tip call from a woman. He was shot in the head."

Despite the shock, Paul was determined to put it aside as best he could and move forward with what he had planned in Germany: primarily with Nazi era stolen art claims and the possible existence of Dr. Kesler's cottage. He refused to be sidetracked. Yet aware of two

murders now, each coinciding with his arrival near the crime scenes time-wise, he **had** to ask himself: would the murders have occurred if he hadn't been retained by *Gens de Vérité*? Were they committed by (or ordered by) the same person or persons? Ultimately, should he have accepted Leon's assignment in the first place?

By the time he spotted Karl sitting on a bench at the railway station, he had put this most recent murder into the same brain crevice as Kesler's and headed toward the bench with a smile and a wave.

Karl rose and they shook hands. "Something's wrong," the historian said.

"What makes you think that?" Paul asked.

"Your handshake. It's as weak as my nine-year-old's. That's not you, Paul."

They both sat and Paul gave snippets of the Kesler and Durand murders. They agreed there might be a connection, but Paul stated that his visit hinged on learning what he could about the organized theft of art and other items by Nazi plunderers throughout European countries, especially Germany. He heaped great praise on the historian for his assistance during one of Paul's cases in Berlin. As agreed upon during their earlier phone call, Karl slipped a small caliber pistol, an ankle rig and some extra rounds Paul's way. Paul carefully pocketed them and fired back an agreeable nod and the comment, "You know airplanes, I see."

Karl, an attorney, was short, stout and stunningly

dressed in an open brown jacket and tie along with bright red suspenders. His voice was slightly accented but sonorous. Aware of Paul's interest in stem cells, he mentioned the new work being done in Japan.

"They're struggling with a new approach, but the rest of the world's scientific community can't duplicate what they're doing over there."

"Not surprising," Paul said, "but Karl, rather than getting into stem cells … maybe later … I'd like to get your opinion on stolen art and other properties that once belonged to non-Nazi Germans and now, rightfully, to their heirs. They say any monies derived that way have been deposited secretly in Switzerland, although such a scheme … going on for years now … is beginning to fall apart, thanks to certain U.S. investigators."

Karl squirmed nervously on the bench.

"You know all of this?" Paul inquired.

"All of it. I've kept up and so have my histarian friends around the country."

"So it's happening. Widespread?"

"Widespread. Although less intense because people are worried about being dragged into a … a 'hit list' … let's call it … and possibly sent to jail."

"Thought so," Paul said, "and one other thing about it. I just returned from Argentina. They say down there that the German Jews who relocated there are furious about it. That certain Nazis have stolen what belongs to them."

"I don't blame them."

"And even about France … which is special to me … people have confused Vichy French with all the French citizens. And it's unfortunate," Paul said. "I hate when Paris itself gets discredited."

Paul fidgeted some, prior to asking Karl if time were at a premium.

"Not at all. I can give you all day. This is an honor for me."

"Well, thank you. For me, too."

Paul removed a folded number of printed pages from his side pocket, saying, "I have some background I downloaded just before I left for here. The article is titled *Nazi Plunder*. I underlined a couple of sections that I think say it all … just to underscore what we're talking about. May I summarize them?"

"Yes, I'd like to hear."

Paul went ahead:

> Adolph Hitler was an unsuccessful artist who was denied admission to the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts every time he tried. It's probably the reason why, in *Mein Kampf*, he ferociously attacked modern art in as many ways as he could think of.

And the second is:

> The Nazis plundered and plundered

> from every territory they conquered. It was as if it was the only reason they were fighting and it was done systematically. Hitler wanted some of what they accumulated to be kept in a kind of Führermuseum, and some to be given to high-rankers like Hermann Göring. Why? Who knows? Probably to impress them or to reward them for doing what he commanded. Probably both. Also, many Nazi activities were financially supported by the valuables they stole.

"There," Paul said, "just to give you an idea about part of what we're dealing with."

"Very informative," Karl said, almost politely. "You summarized as if you memorized." And Paul knew immediately that the histarian was aware of most, if not all of what had been revealed to him.

After an uncomfortable lull, Paul resumed the conversation. "There's just one more thing I'd like to check on while I'm here, Karl, but I'm not sure it can be done."

"And that's …?"

"We have it on good authority that Kesler owned a cottage here in Hamburg. But we don't know where, and I have no key. If he does … did … and you could learn the address and get a key for it—and if we entered the

place, it might be very helpful. No telling what we might find there."

"Wouldn't be a problem, Paul. Just outside of where we're sitting is our main shopping street, *Monckebergstrasse*. It connects this central station with our city hall, the *Hamburg Rathaus*. I have plenty of good friends who work there. We could walk it from here, see if such a cottage exists; if so, ask for a key to the place and drive there. My car is nearby."

"They would let you borrow a key?"

"Because of my legal work, we do favors for each other nearly every day."

All went well at the *Rathaus*. Kesler **did** own a cottage not far from the center of town, about a mile away, and keys were obtained with no questions asked. Neither side mentioned his passing and Paul held his breath until a set of keys was handed to Karl. They then drove the mile in Karl's black Porsche 911.

The area looked deserted and the designation "cottage" didn't come close to fitting the actual description of what they saw at the address given. At the far end of a cul-de-sac, an almost palatial structure got bigger and bigger as they drove the cobblestone driveway up an elevation about 400 yards long. It was lined with a towering ocher-colored stone wall on one side and a solid row of boxwood shrubs on the other. At the top, Paul looked back down the road they had just

traversed. It and its cul-de-sac reminded him of a giant flattened lollipop. And the noon weather—sunnier than usual—highlighted the surroundings.

The house itself had more of a Neo-French design than a German one, with a steeply pitched, hipped roof and facades that were two stories high and asymmetrical. All doors and windows were round or arched above and most extended upward through the cornice line. Engraved in a gold plate just lateral to the front entrance door was the simple word: "KESLER".

Karl unlocked the door and they hesitantly walked in.

"Holy cow!" Paul uttered.

All rooms they could see were empty. No furniture, no crates, no baskets, no wall clocks. Nothing. They walked around slowly, disbelieving. All rooms had a perfume smell of sorts. Faint but definite. Most flooring was carpeted light green and was smooth and spotless.

"Cleaned out," Karl whispered.

"What a shocker," Paul whispered back.

"Why are we whispering?" Karl asked.

"Beats me." Paul replied, an octave higher. "Just goes with the emptiness here, I guess. Let's try upstairs."

They ascended a long circular stairway. At the top, scattered around and blocking the doorway to most rooms was a wooden cabinet on rollers and eight or ten cardboard boxes. None had tops, including the wooden cabinet. All containers were empty except one that had a

single sheet of paper at its bottom. It had English writing on it. When Karl wasn't looking, Paul removed the paper and put it in his pocket without reading it.

Instead, he spent a minute straightening out the many piles of folders interspersed among the containers. No more than a minute, for he was anxious to read what was on the sheet of paper. Paul drifted off to the side, took out the paper and, his back toward Karl, read:

> Paul---You may wonder how I knew you would be here. I'm sorry to say that by now many French and Germans know your every move. I'm not one of them, but I overheard a conversation while sitting at an adjoining booth in a restaurant. I know the things you're looking for, namely answers about Germany, Japan and Switzerland. The Swiss especially because, even as I write, they are still hiding investments, gold and other valuables stolen from Jewish people and hidden in their country with little or no difficulty.
>
> I would like to meet with you, Paul, to discuss all of the above but, speaking honestly, for personal reasons, also. These reasons involve who else but you and me? If you're interested, please meet me there at 3 p.m. today. I shall taxi there in time.

> And please, let us both be alone. In case you're suspicious of this, I'll watch for your taxi and come out to greet you while you're still inside it. Marlene

Despite the last sentence, Paul thought it was a setup with a woman as a hook. Maybe a woman didn't even write the message. Well written—knows her or his English. Handwriting seems to be female.

And after feeling for the pistol in his side pocket, he took little time deciding that he would return there as suggested. Though what he had just read intrigued him, he forced himself to put it all aside and return his attention to the task at hand.

The two men remained momentarily dumbstruck but knew that the mess before them represented the folders Paul was searching for on behalf of *Gens de Vérité*.

Finally Paul said, "Here's my smartphone. Can you call one of your friends at city hall and ask how this came about and who in hell had keys? We never did ask how they got them in the first place."

Without commenting, Karl made the call, was referred to a bank, and learned that Kesler had said he wouldn't be back for a few months and left the keys with them. All except one which he kept for himself. He also asked for and paid for the house to be emptied of all its contents, donating them, in effect, to charity. When questioned about the folders, the bank employee said he

knew nothing about them.

Paul leafed through every pile of folders, discovered they all had papers in them that were handwritten in French and, resorting to the smattering of French he was familiar with, knew they dealt with stem cell research. He next carefully examined the exterior of each folder--more than 70, he estimated—and concluded there was no empty one among them.

They sat on the top step and exchanged what each had learned. "Kesler had only a single key," Karl said. "He had a partial mortgage on the house, so the rest of the keys—four of them—were kept at the mortgage department of a local bank."

As an afterthought, and protecting his words, he said, "Wouldn't surprise me if even ***that*** bank had hidden assets in Switzerland." Paul struck Karl's shoulder with his elbow.

"And I've got to say that despite all these folders, they were probably divvied up into the boxes," Paul said. "That way, even a single person could have brought them here. But why?"

With Marlene's note in mind, Paul said, "Let's call it a day, Karl, and I can't thank you enough. Let's just drive back to the station and I'll take it from there."

Paul had no idea what all of "it" would be, but when he phoned Leon later on, he intended to ask him to arrange for the folders to be returned to France.

# Chapter 10

After being left off at the station by Karl, Paul had about an hour to fill before taking a cab back to meet with a lady named Marlene. Hopefully.

Whenever he sensed possible danger or chancy uncertainty, he automatically checked to be sure there was a gun either at his shoulder or ankle. He crossed one leg over the other and didn't even have to pat his ankle to ensure he was armed.

He walked aimlessly around the station for a while, then decided to order a tuna sandwich and a soda at one of the small food marts. It was one time when he was glad the waitress delayed delivering them to him. When finished eating, he calculated it wasn't too late to phone Joe Gomez in Buenos Aires—eight p.m. their time.

"Joe, not too late, is it?"

"Never. What's up?"

"Related to the Kesler situation, I think, but could you research it? Did there happen to be a guy named Durand … Donald Durand … who was a friend of his there? If so, dig up all you can about him, okay? I'll buy our next pizza—there or here."

"You got it, old buddy. I'll get on it first thing in the morning."

Next, Paul hailed a taxi by tapping the Hailo feature of his Android phone, and within minutes headed back to the "cottage." It was two-fifty.

He inquired of the cabby whether or not he had been in the area before. The cabby replied he often picked up or dropped off passengers at a lower level and never recalled seeing any cars driving to the higher level. But two days before, when he happened to look up the cul-de-sac, he noticed a large moving van parked in front of the "cottage".

Paul made a mental note of the timing and lowered his window. The cab circled to the front entrance of the home and came to a stop.

Simultaneously, a woman bounced out toward his door and said, "Paul, it's me—Marlene. You can dismiss the driver. And I swear to you, there's no one else here."

"And no one else is expected?" he asked.

"No one."

She was a tall woman and, in Paul's opinion, just a shade less attractive than Sylvie. Around thirty and

curvaceous, she wore tight-fitting charcoal slacks and a similarly colored tight jersey. If her gladiator sandals were replaced by high heels, she might have appeared even taller than Paul. Her jet black hair was pulled back in a chignon, and an easy, full smile conveyed warmth and sincerity.

Paul paid the driver and slowly exited the cab, both eyes surveying what he could as they walked toward the front door. Unexpectedly, he felt her take him by the hand.

"I'm very happy you came, Paul. I have so much to say."

Inside, they sat on the step below the first landing of the staircase. She edged closer to him as she said, "Before we get to what I want to discuss regarding your ... your obligations, I guess is the best way to put it ... may I bring up what I had called personal before?"

"Certainly. You have me bewildered. But even before that, may I ask what your country of origin is? You sound so American."

"That's because I am. I was born in Chicago and lived there most of my life. I happened to latch onto a guy who'd been following your career as a treasure hunter and that's what led to my following it, too.

"In fact, I've heard you speak at least a half dozen times on stem cell research. There in Chicago, in New York, at a Yale symposium in New Haven. Then about two years ago, I was lured here to work for a German

cosmetics firm. Lived right in this house. Didn't like the work so that lasted about two months only. And my former husband and I divorced at about the same time. He moved out but I stayed awhile. I happened to keep a key in case I left anything behind. Now I'm unattached, shall we say?"

Facetiously, Paul thought he should pen a short story about house keys. And he didn't know why, but he wondered if Marlene had been entirely truthful about her background.

As for her, for the first time since Paul arrived, she showed signs of indecision. She put both hands in her pockets and rocked forward and backward, almost imperceptibly.

"That's my history in a nutshell," she said. "And next, without sounding like a crazy loon, may I come right out and say how much I'm attracted to you?"

Paul had expected that type of question based on her behavior and felt obliged to answer, "Well, thank you. I haven't known you for more than ten minutes, and the feeling is mutual."

She removed her hands from her pockets and cupped them together. That, together with a facial expression she'd seen among racehorse winners, prompted her to say, "Then can we do something about it, right here and now? Oh, how you tempt me!"

Despite Paul's travels around the world, he had never encountered a woman so direct. And he too was

tempted, but chose to say, "I can't do that to Sylvie. I want to stay loyal to her."

Marlene rose and walked halfway toward the next landing. Paul was glad he couldn't see her face. She turned slowly and returned to where she'd been sitting, only farther from his side.

She seemed composed enough and managed a meek question. "Maybe sometime in the future?"

"Yeah, who knows? Maybe sometime in the future."

There was an uncomfortable lull before he decided to ask where she was now living.

"North of here … not far … walking distance. It's a small apartment along the quay for the *Alster* ships. St Peter's Church is nearby."

" '*Alster*'?" Paul asked?

"Yes. She's an intelligence ship of the German Navy. Has all kinds of modern electronic equipment on it. And antennas you wouldn't believe. She can listen in on radio and phone conversations miles away."

"Doesn't give you much privacy, does it?"

"No, but I never think about it." Then, like an injured bird that suddenly became airborne, Marlene said, "Maybe if you change your mind, you can visit with me."

"Maybe. I'd like to see that ship."

"That's all?"

She smiled confidently as he neglected the question,

instead asking, "But can we get into the serious stuff you referred to before?"

She passed off the change of subject as if the previous one never existed.

"You mean Germany, Switzerland and Japan?"

"Yeah, those three."

"Well, we've pretty much exhausted Germany for now."

"Okay, Switzerland then. And we'll leave Japan for last."

Marlene had earlier unstrapped her sandals, claiming tightness. She now let one drop forward halfway and played with it, using her toes.

"There's plenty you must already know about the situation there," she said. "Safe haven for valuables after thievery by the Nazis and their French counterparts, for example."

Paul liked the way she had put it and pledged he'd remember the phrase.

"But the point I want to make is that there's more to it than that—as bad as it is," Marlene said.

"Like?"

"Like murder. Murder and me."

"You murdered someone?"

"No, never. I can't say for sure, but it was probably a Swiss banker who murdered a man who was my husband at the time."

"Oh … sorry. But why?"

"Because he knew too much about what the killer's bank and nearly all the others were doing. Hiding the world's valuables, that's all. Valuables that belonged to people legitimately—and to people illegitimately, like certain Germans. And he began to write about it—for publication. He even got into the habit of critizing Japan, too ... for starting the war, for objecting to America's insistence that they apologize, and so on. I guess what I'm trying to say is that the killer might think my former husband and I shared the same ideas—those he was writing about."

"Did you?"

"Maybe. Let's just say to an extent ... . and leave it at that."

"Who **was** your husband?"

"Dr. Kesler."

# Chapter 11

Paul was visibly rattled, and if there were a sweating contest—not concerning the amount but the speed in which any appeared—he would have won, without queston.

"Hold on now," he said. "You mean Dr. *Albert* Kesler, the stem cell pioneer?"

"That's the one. And he was murdered not because of anything involving stem cells or because he was a doctor, but because he began writing articles that were teeing people off. Especially the wrong people. He even criticized Eva Perón."

"**The** Eva Perón? Evita?"

"Yes, a woman I always admired. She used her wits to get what she wanted."

"You call it wits?"

"Well, whatever."

Though taken aback by still another reference to Evita, Paul said, "But returning to the murder ..."

Marlene waved her hand as if to shoo off a fly and barged in with, "I've heard that somebody was paid to do the job."

"That's what I've heard, too."

"Anyway, I'd like you to find his killer," Marlene said.

Paul exerted plenty to align his thoughts and responded with, "But you divorced him, and I don't understand, and therefore ..."

"No. He divorced me. And I've also learned that the killer knows some people who know his identity and that he believes I'm one of them. So he's after **me** now."

By then, Paul not only took it all in but felt he would again be assuming too much responsibility by agreeing to her request. Yet curiosity, an increased feeling for Marlene, and respect for pure and simple justice were tossed around in his brain. He knew that the last idea was corny at best. Still he reached a conclusion.

"Tell you what," he said. "I've got loads to do, but I'll give it a try."

Marlene looked relieved and his next thought revolved around her obvious play for him. She had replaced flattery with a possible attempt to fortify her request involving Kesler.

But he countered with the silent notion that she was

a flirt to begin with, and he let it go at that. Except for one other thought: her flirtations probably spawned the divorce.

Paul got up as if he had little energy to spare and said, "Well, I must carry on. It's off to Switzerland now. Learned a lot here, Marlene." He took her hand and kissed the back of it. "And met a lovely lady on top of it."

She rose and pressed against his body. "Is that the best you can do?" she asked.

He turned to face her, stepped back some, then drew her close and kissed her firmly on the lips. He'd held his breath through the whole act and, feeling uncomfortable because he missed his Sylvie so much, he took charge as though nothing of the sort had just occurred.

They exchanged phone numbers, he contacted a taxi and while they waited, they discussed—mostly in generalities—various problems both attributed to and endured by the people of Japan.

A period of silence was just as long as the discussion and at the door, he repeated the kiss, then walked briskly toward the taxi that had just pulled up.

Making sure he was watching, she planted a kiss on the spot where his lips had made contact with the back of her hand, and blew it toward him.

He blew one back … off the palm of his, while thinking: If it's a game she's playing, I can play one, too.

"Wait!" she yelled out. "I almost forgot. I'm leaving

here too, you know."

Paul stopped short and nearly lost his balance as he turned around sharply and said, "Of course. What was I thinking?"

"About too many things, I'd say."

At the station, Paul said, "We're going in different directions but let's keep touch. Phone me if you hear anything worthwhile about the murder and I'll do the same. Plus don't worry, Marlene. It won't be a case where I just listen for possible clues. I'll be asking questions from now on."

"Thanks, Paul … ever so much."

"So I'll leave you now … quieter in the next room … I've got to make some phone calls. If you're still here when I return, we'll talk some more."

"And another kiss?"

"And another kiss."

That having been said, he thought perhaps all her sexual inferences were not part of a ruse after all. But only "perhaps".

"Leon? Me, Paul."

"You know, I had vibes that you'd call right about now."

"Why not? You're psychic. Why can't you be about my upcoming Swiss and Japanese visits? Which reminds me: I can handle from here in Hamburg to Lucerne easily. A plane leaves every hour or so—so no need for

the R.A.F."

"Okay. Good. So what's happened there?"

Paul relayed everything from the findings in the empty "cottage" to the encounter with Marlene, including her disclosure that Kesler had been her husband at one time. Paul told him of her alleged fondness for him for several years and even read him her letter.

Yet he left out any kissing specifics. He also downplayed her wish for him to help find Kesler's murderer but didn't elaborate.

Leon may have been generally surprised, but he didn't show it. His only reaction was: "Watch out for her, Paul. If she knows about Sylvie ..."

"She does."

"That means if she's legit in her feelings, she'll try harder. On the other hand, if she's working for someone else—who knows who at this stage—she'll most likely slip up in some way. But you'll have to be on guard ... totally on guard. She'll probably even offer you a night in bed and ..."

"Leon, I could have had free nights at hotels and motels from Finland to the Falklands, but I haven't given in, yet. Tempted? Yes. Teaming up? No."

"I know. I apologize, but you know what I mean. Just be careful. You've got plenty to worry about: stem cell research, goings-on in different countries, Kesler's murder and now, a woman's request to find that murderer. Not to mention the other murder: the hotel clerk."

Neither said a word until Leon came back with: "By the way, if that gal and Kesler divorced, why is she so interested in finding his killer?"

"She says some individuals believe they know the identity of the killer. The list varies, but supposedly she's on it, so he's after her, too. That's why. She fears for her life."

Several seconds later, Leon said, "Let's get back to the stem cell folders, though they're not my primary concern, as you know. But whether I like it or not, they can be a subsidiary part of the Vichy France and Swiss connection."

Paul had the distinct feeling Leon had made some notes.

"You say the folders looked intact and there was no empty one?" Leon continued.

"None that I could see."

"Heck, I wonder why and when they were brought there."

"Me, too."

"Well, no matter. I'll make sure they're brought back here to Paris."

Another silent moment. "How was Karl Heller?" Leon asked.

"Excellent. Good man."

"Okay—last thing I have written here. How does this sound? Instead of your calling David from there, why don't we save time? I'll call him and you go ahead

to Switzerland. Can you tell I'm so damned interested in the state of things there that I can hardly sleep at night?

"And so David doesn't feel slighted, I'll tell him it was my idea, that you were a little sour on it. And if he wants to speak directly with you, he'll call you. Are you a little sour on it?"

"You want an honest answer?"

"Yes."

"Yeah, I am. But I'll go along with it because you're paying the bills."

There was no pause this time. "You're so damned honest, Paul."

"Well that didn't take long," Paul said to Captain Joe Gomez, who was on the phone.

"There may be more, but this is what I've found out so far. Surprised the hell out of me."

Paul, saturated with information of all kinds from all sorts, figured he should take notes, and he did. "Let's have it," he said.

"First of all, Durand was a fired American police officer. I couldn't find out why he was fired but he ended up down here and worked in a local hotel. Second, he somehow became a roommate of Kesler's for the last year. They argued all the time, according to their landlord. Third, Durand stayed here another three months when Kesler was kicked out of the country. Fourth—and get this—Durand knew of the prior you saw in France!"

Somewhat confounded, Paul asked, "In what way?"

"I couldn't find out more. How? Why? Where? And so on. Just that they knew each other. Or better put, we keep written records here of everyone coming by with questions who happens to look unusual. I leafed through the last couple of years and the entry was that an elderly man who claimed he was from France and who was dressed like a priest … you know, with a white stiff collar and all … said he was an old friend of Durand and asked where he lived."

Paul felt as though he'd just assumed ownership of the misery of the world, but he didn't let on. And it quickly passed.

"I guess it's got to be significant," he said, "but *why* is the question. They probably met by chance somewhere. I do know the prior used to travel a lot."

He waited for further information from the captain. With none forthcoming, he ended the phone conversation with a comment about Marlene, pointing out that she'd made an unexpected play for him.

"You must get it all the time, Paul."

"Not really. At least not from somebody that direct."

Wanting to get off the subject, he said, "But, good work, Joe. We may learn what it all means some day. Anything else comes up, let me know."

Paul then tore up his notes and said, "Incidentally, I

know you've followed the details of both murders even from a distance—probably because of me. I'm usually at a distance too, you know."

"Maybe because of your travels ... you never sit still."

"Anyway, you hear of any significant forensic evidence in either one: prints, DNA on the dagger and so on?"

"None at all."

"Well, if you do, please let me know."

"That's a given, Paul."

This time, the mention of forensics and DNA brought Paul back to a more comfortable time when he last lectured on what he termed, "DNA and the New Genetics—A Double-edged Sword?" It took place at Hollings General Hospital at the request of David Brooks.

He prefaced his remarks by admitting it wasn't exactly his field of expertise, but that he'd often read about genetic cases. Then, too, he would stress that his work as a treasure hunter often exposed him to experts who would fill him in on new developments.

"It was as if they, themselves, had the chance to lecture in addition to their combing an area for forensic clues," he would explain.

"And Dr. Brooks, right here in the front row, has no doubt been the most helpful to me."

He'd given the talk so often that he knew its contents

by heart. His favorite part was at the very beginning. It dealt with confidentiality of genetic information.

Paul wondered if he should continue this unplanned diversion, but it appeared to relax his mind some, so he thought he'd carry on, if only for a few more minutes:

> Who owns and controls genetic information about someone?
> On the research front, is it the scientific researcher?
> Is it the institution with which he or she is affiliated?
> Or is it the individual from whom the genetic information is obtained?
> For that matter, who owns our DNA?
> Who owns our genes?
> Did you ever stop to think about it:
> Who owns us?
> Does one's wife own her husband?
> Does he own her?
> Do our children own us?
>
> I could go on and on with this sort of thing but I'll end up this early section of my talk with three most important questions: Do members of your family have the right to know the results of your genetic tests? Do the police, the military, employers, insurers, and schools

> have a right to know? Is there a potential for genetic discrimination on the part of government, insurance companies, schools, banks, and the like?

Very little of the digression was germane to the problems at hand, but they conveyed a brief sliver of relief from the realities he was confronting.

# Chapter 12

Lucerne, Switzerland turned out to be one of the most beautiful cities both Paul and Vincent had ever visited. They could have flown there by private jet, but at the last minute Paul decided on driving in a rented car. He'd calculated it would take about eight or nine hours and they would share the driving. He offered the excuse of having more time to "think things over" in contrast to what he'd have in a one-hour flight. Of equal importance, however, was the opportunity to remain armed with his loaded pistol.

The bulk of what he thought over was the two murders, Marlene and her legitimacy, Gomez's revelations, and what he expected to learn from Leonard Swingeth, the Swiss banking representative who informed Leon of his desire to meet with Paul.

Once there, Paul couldn't decide if the hills or villages were the more picturesque, even on an overcast day. He thought the houses looked like a cuckoo clock demonstration they had partially witnessed and was most impressed by the famous Chapel Bridge, the majesty of the swan displays and the huge canvas-topped flea market. It was jam-packed with offerings and the cleanest he'd ever passed through.

Unusual for him, he stumbled while reflexively feeling for his ankle rig—one leg brushing over the other. It occurred near the rear of the market where, passing in tandem by a statue of William Tell, was a slender figure in a head-to-toe burqa made of gray lace and wearing huge sunglasses. But there was no sun. Outside, the individual removed the glasses and spoke to a nearby associate in a high-pitched woman's voice.

It was approximately there that arrangements had been made to meet with Swingeth at a specific Swiss time: Sunday, 2 p.m. Remarkably, in only 20 minutes. They sat on an ornate bench that seemed more fashionable for inside living room use despite its lack of armrests. Paul resumed his thinking while Vincent simply leafed through a magazine that someone had left behind.

Within that 20 minutes, Paul eyed a tall man heading their way, walking more briskly, smiling more openly as he approached. He extended a hand between them as if uncertain whose to shake first.

"Paul and Vincent," he said, "good to see you both

again. What's it been ... about a year?" Their vigorous handshakes startled some passersby.

"Just about, Len. Once again, thanks for your help in the Heidelberg Castle deal."

"It was the least I could do, and certainly was a pleasure to work with you."

They made room for Swingeth to sit between them. "So, you're here," he said, "and I'm glad of that, because I have some things to talk about that concern you directly, Paul."

"Me?" Paul responded like an innocent child.

"Yes, I'm afraid so, and I didn't want to discuss it over the phone."

His height appeared to increase once he sat down, indicating a dominant upper body. Well over 50 and a handsome man, he had a crew cut of light brown hair and steady blue eyes that gave the impression, however, of viewing everything in sight all at once. He wore a brown blazer with lighter brown slacks and a yellow and green striped tie. A matching handkerchief was prominently displayed in his chest pocket. He fluffed it regularly as he spoke.

"Before you begin, Len," Paul said, "I'm guessing, of course, but I'll bet you were once a boxer. Right?"

"You mean a pugilist?"

"Yes, if that's what they're called over here."

"Why are you always right? Yes, I spent 12 years in the ring. Got my brains beat a few times but won a

goodly share of the bouts. How could you tell?"

"Upper body gives it away."

"Really? Never thought about it, but that's good. People will be careful of me."

All three laughed.

"Now you work for the Swiss government," Paul said. "Do you have an official title?"

"No, but some say I'm a roving financial ambassador … or is it 'roaming'? I'm usually assigned to Spain—Seville specifically. Sometimes Madrid." He fluffed up the handkerchief, it fell to the ground and he stuffed it into his side pocket.

"It's funny you should bring it up because that's what I want to talk to you about. At least the Spain part."

"How so?" Paul asked.

"You have the time to hear some background?"

"Yeah, you're mainly why we've come here in the first place."

"And here on a bench is okay, or would you rather go to a restaurant?"

Swingeth's dragging things out began to disturb Paul. "Here is fine," he said. "Background; teeth of the matter; whatever—go right ahead."

"Well, I know you're fond of France and fond of *Gens de Vérité* and somehow I associate you with that country. After the U.S.A., of course. Anyway, it may be just an idiosyncrasy of mine, but whenever I think of France, I think of Spain—my territory. Even historically,

so often what happens in one rubs off on the other. Maybe like the U.S. and Canada. Or like the U.S. and Alaska before it became a part of the U.S."

Paul didn't fully agree with the comparisons but went along with what was said. And the more he heard Len say, the more concerned he became. What's the guy leading up to?

"May I keep talking?" Len asked.

"Yes, please do." Paul had a sneaking suspicion he'd learn plenty, whether or not it pertained to the problems at hand—those concerned with banking, bankers, hidden monies, Swiss stem cell research, or Switzerland investments dating back to the Nazi and Vichy French eras. Or as he had practiced how Marlene had expressed it: "Safe haven for valuables after thievery by the Nazis and their French counterparts."

"Fine. I've heard people speak of the legacy of Eva Perón …"

"There's that Eva again," Paul said softly.

"What?"

"Nothing."

Len looked perplexed but said, "Let's start, then, with the legacy of Francisco Franco. As you know, he was a dictator who ruled Spain from 1939 to 1975. And 40 years later—now—Spain's up to its jaw in economic troubles. All of which fuels what? Extremism.

"Now I must point out that some Spaniards are proud of photographs showing them holding Nazi flags

or giving Nazi salutes. There are hate crimes galore and Catalina even wants to secede."

"Really?"

"Really. And there are enlarging groups who speak of armies against humanity—ones that engage in far right incidents." Len swallowed hard once … then again, only harder.

"You may not know this, but a judge in Argentina recently wanted the arrest of some security officials who were around during Franco's time. The charge, he said, would be crimes against humanity. Even Spain's judiciary was tempted to follow in those footsteps but turned the other cheek in order to preserve its peaceful transition to democracy. In other words, to distance itself from the Franco approach.

"As a result, extremism has begun to flourish. There are Spanish groups like 'The Pact of Forgetting' and 'Movement Against Intolerance' that practice and promote this new movement—new to them. And that's where you come in, Paul."

"How? To help in some way?"

"No. To stop promoting it. That's the talk, so I'd be careful while you're here. Every banker in Spain knows of your investigative skills and that you're either in Switzerland now or will be soon. They're plain scared that you'll be making things worse for them."

It was Paul's turn to swallow hard and he made a face that was an expression of pain, if not confusion.

In addition, he had to lasso his voice to keep from hollering.

"I can't believe what I'm hearing," he said. "Do they have proof of anything you're saying?"

"It makes no difference—the belief is there. So be careful. In fact, some know we're friends and have advised me to sever all contact with you. Just this morning, two of our more aggressive bankers ... shall we call them ... said they're out to get you."

In just a few brief moments, Paul had graduated from concern to disgust to anger. He felt tight and dry and tried to find the spit to spit but couldn't. He crossed his leg again, felt the pistol and wished he had another in a shoulder rig. If not that, at least his Gunsite folding tactical knife. Plus more ammunition.

He wanted not to, but he couldn't help believing Len's warning. Somehow on foreign soil, he felt less confident, nearly power-deprived, but once more, he made a giant effort of tapping into his Vesuvian energy and said, "Okay, Len, thank you for the warning. And now, can we get into the guts of my visit?"

"Of course. I'm sorry for starting the way I did, but it all preyed on my mind, as you could probably tell."

Wrinkles terraced Paul's forehead as he said, "I understand, but let's move forward now. I'll start by saying many believe that the Swiss not only hid investments for other countries but that, as a result of that, no taxes had to be paid. Nazi Germans and Vichy French are the culprits

here and a good deal of the money had been stolen from Jewish people during the so-called Nazi regime. If what I'm saying is true, it doesn't matter time-wise. Those monies still belong to Jewish descendents and they have a rightful claim to them."

"Let me interrupt you here, Paul. So much of what you're saying and most likely *will* say are things I understand and agree with. But it's not for someone in my position to go bandying it all about. Some of this goes back to before either of us was even born.

"Speaking for myself, now, I can't assume any guilt, but I can hear you out and verify or disagree with what I know. And, most important of all, let's not let anything we share today ruin our personal relationship."

Paul, with a nod of approval and a handshake, added in a friendly tone, "I couldn't have stated it better, Len. And thanks."

"You're quite welcome. Go ahead with what's on your mind regarding our country and if there are questions, I'll do my best with answers."

"Let me get another thing out of the way—in case you're wondering," Paul said. "Vincent here. He's like a brother. His loyalty to me and to *Gens de Vérité* is … what should I say … **fierce** … so don't let his presence interfere with any exchange of information."

Vincent, seemingly embarrassed, tied his shoe, although it didn't need it.

"Now," Paul said, "we've worked together before.

And you know that written notes and yours truly are about as friendly as you and I are—if you know what I mean. Rather clumsy way to put it, but I wrote down some questions for you. If I hadn't, I sure as hell would have forgotten one or two … maybe more.

Secretly, Paul believed such an approach when shown to Leon would satisfy the *Vérité* chairman, even if the answers were hard to decipher.

With that, he removed a pad from his satchel and opened it to a paper-clipped section. He had planned on taking each question one at a time, but Len suggested first reading the entire list all at once. "That way, I won't repeat myself, knowing what's coming later. See, I can be clumsy, too."

Paul felt he had no reason not to comply and read the numbered notes in the pad:

> (1) How many banks or individuals store or stored their investments in Switzerland, especially among Germans and French?
> (2) How much is stolen Jewish money or came from stolen Jewish valuables, like gold or silver?
> (3) Did stem cell research change Switzerland?
> (4) Is your country still a safe haven for investors (people and foreign countries)? Or has such a role become a major liability?
> (5) Would you say there's a banking crisis in

Switzerland?

(6)Are there Nazi and Vichy French here who are leading a drive to create a master race? If so, are they using Swiss banking to help this along?"

Paul slapped the pad shut as though he didn't want the notes to escape. But in a way he wanted them to, for each day—each hour—he wished he hadn't been in so deep with Leon's wishes. He thought his obligation would involve—and end with—the location of a mysterious cabinet. That would have been that and, as it turned out, it was already achieved.

Had he known, however, that in addition, he would have become ensconced in a labyrinth with international implications and intrigue, he would have refused the assignment. And, as it turned out, it was accompanied with implied threats of his death, last minute changes of travel plans, and an unexpected encounter with a woman he only half-trusted.

While Paul was reading his notes, he also kept an eye on two young men who had twice circled the bench and once even stopped to ask Len for directions to a hardware store. They were identically dressed like house painters with paint-stained overalls and caps.

During their last—and slowest—pass before them, they suddenly stopped, not six feet in front of Len, looked at one another, withdrew hand guns from their

pockets and opened fire on him. They didn't include Paul or Vincent in the surprise attack, instead rushing off and disappearing into a clump of trees.

"No! No!" Len had screamed before tumbling off the bench.

Paul had yelled, "**Down.**" withdrew his pistol and slid laterally off the bench while Vincent squeezed down and stretched out onto his abdomen.

Paul was tempted to give chase but noticed the men had disappeared into a car and sped off. After insuring that Vincent hadn't been hit, he turned his attention to the fallen Lenny Swingeth. He was covered with blood and had no pulse or respirations.

"I can't believe we weren't hit ourselves … too … especially after all that talk about … extremism," Paul said breathlessly as he helped Vincent get to his feet.

"They were only after the one they killed," Vincent said. "Did you hear the word 'traitor' during the gunfire?"

"No, is that what they said? I was too busy getting to my own gun."

Within minutes a Swiss police cruiser screeched to a halt, nearly striking the two men who were crouched down beside the body.

What followed over the course of the next hour involved the police being sure Paul and Vincent weren't "in" on the shooting. They went through Paul's satchel more than once and asked why it contained a book he'd

written about Napoleon.

"Because I never bothered to remove it. There's a section I wrote about the emperor's always having a secret box on his person, and I was commissioned to locate a missing filing cabinet. I thought my views expressed in the book might come in handy."

Eventually they allowed him to speak by phone with the local police commander who had helped in the Heidelberg Castle case the year before. That and Paul's association with *Gens de Vérité* was all that was needed for their complete release and for an assurance that they, the police, would be "at the ready" for them at all times. Hearing such support at such an emotional time bolstered Paul's spirits but did little to abolish the Swiss negativity as expressed earlier by the fallen banking representative.

Before starting up their rented car, Paul sat in the driver's seat, his arms stiff and straight against the steering wheel. He knew that a silent Vincent beside him was allowing time for both to decompress. Only once before had they faced a similar danger—a year ago on the island of Elba when they had been investigating the possible murder of Napoleon—again for *Gens de Vérité*. They—Paul, Vincent and, that time, Sylvie—had inquiries that had taken them there and they needed to visit what was known as the island's guardian, Volterraio Castle. It was perched on the summit of a rocky cliff that amounted to a collection of massive boulders, with no

paths to climb and no vegetation to grab onto during an ascent.

Paul couldn't have explained why if he were asked, but he had the urge to read about that experience. Perhaps to soften the potency of what they had just gone through, its being the second time around for them both? He asked Vincent if he would mind if he took the time to read selected passages—after explaining why.

"Ahh ... that moment ... that moment," Vincent answered. "We're lucky we can refer to it. If it helps to read about it, go right ahead. Frankly, I've tried to forget it."

Paul took out the book and read:

> The next morning, Paul, Vincent and Sylvie hardly spoke during the 15-minute drive to the "rutted road." Vincent stopped the car and all three piled out. Sylvie began taking pictures. From their vantage point, Volterraio Castle was more imposing than Paul had anticipated ... he thought it remarkable that the only vegetation was either around his feet or, as viewed against the morning's darkening clouds, clinging to the castle itself. Blades of yellow grass brushed against his legs while the castle appeared smothered in green, brown and yellow, like a camouflaged fortress. He

knew its construction dated back to the 11th century's Pisan period and that it had dwindled to half its original height. Still it looked indestructible to him and there were other words that swept through his mind: powerful, formidable, graceful, dignified. Even timeless.

He hadn't yet discussed it with the others but Paul had every intention of inspecting the castle up close, to glance over an entire sea as the Tuscans had done to spot invading Saracen pirates; to see its underground tunnels firsthand; to walk among its walls much like Napoleon two centuries ago, before the crumbling and erosion began. Then he wanted to observe the blackbirds he'd read about. They had been delivered there as a trick and he understood they were still nesting among the ruins. In the dim light, he could barely make out a few circling about. Theirs were the only sounds he heard. Much smaller than normal, they gave the illusion that the structure was bigger than it was, as viewed from long distances by the French, the Turks, the Saracens or any other enemies.

And who knows, he mused, perhaps

they might stumble upon something left behind, something hidden centuries before and now exposed. *The box that Napoleon allegedly carried on his frequent visits there?*

He removed his sunglasses for it was growing darker by the minute. He then asked Sylvie to wait in the car and lock the doors.

"You ready?" he whispered to Vincent.

"If you are. What looks like the best route to the top?"

Paul tweaked his chin. "Let's check around," he said. "You go that way and I'll go the opposite." He pointed to his left and right. "If you find a halfway decent approach, give a holler. I'll do the same."

"Got it," Vincent said. "Incidentally, why are we speaking so softly?"

"So we might hear echoes of Napoleon's voice. The rumor is that he routinely spoke out loud in Italian up there."

They both chuckled. As Vincent went off, Paul headed right. He passed giant rock after giant rock on his left. Interspersed

among them were formations that brought to mind the stalagmites of caves he had explored. He stopped occasionally to survey possible routes to the castle high up. Minutes later he looked back and saw that their car was no longer visible.

Up ahead, several rocks formed a mound nearer the road, narrowing it some. **What the!** He thought his heart would race out of control!

Twenty yards in front, three men leaned against the back of a black car. They rose to attention, hands on hips, legs apart. Red hoods covered their heads. The eye and mouth slots were overly large, revealing dark skin and mustaches. All three moved slowly toward him.

Paul had the presence of mind to notice that the car's back bumper contained no decal as was the case back at the museum. But of more immediate concern was what to do. Turn and run? Strike up a conversation? Say, "Excuse me?" He might have done so had they not been wearing hoods.

Suddenly Paul heard Vincent's voice from behind and slightly hillside. He held a pistol in each hand. "Back off!"

he screamed at the men. He leaped onto the road and swiftly positioned himself in front of Paul.

The men kept coming.

"Stop or else!" Vincent's voice was louder and firmer as he straightened both arms toward the hooded men, now ten yards away.

They stopped.

"Put your hands behind your head, all of you." Without taking his eyes off them, Vincent twisted his mouth to the side and said, "Show 'em, Paul, in case they don't understand.

Paul complied, as did the men.

"Now, one by one, take out your guns and throw them on the ground," Vincent continued. "And don't try anything funny. I've shot these pistols many times before. Shake your heads if you understand me."

They shook their heads. They followed Vincent's command and within seconds, five handguns lay on the road.

"You in the middle," Vincent said, "only one gun?"

The man didn't respond.

Vincent tipped his pistol in his direction and the man reached into his

back pocket.

"Easy now," Vincent said. The man flipped a small silver handgun onto the road.

"Thank you, gentlemen. Now all of you—on the ground, face down, hands behind your head."

They spoke for the first time, each saying, "Si."

Vincent handed one of his pistols to Paul and said, "Keep them covered. Every second." He picked up the men's guns and hurled them far up the cliff, one at a time. He then walked over to their car and shot out its tires.

"Let's go," Vincent said. "There's enough room to turn our car around. And you guys? We're walking backwards so don't dare get up until we're out of sight. Get it?"

As they inched away, Paul remained stunned over Vincent's skill in taking control of the situation. Leon was right: *What a bodyguard!*

"Why didn't you whisper to me that you'd be doubling back?" Paul asked.

"Because I figured if we were somehow being watched, they would see

that and I didn't want them to. Besides, it wasn't necessary for you to know."

At the car, Sylvie bolted out. "I was so worried! I didn't know what to do. There were four shots. What happened?" "Nothing," Vincent said. "Just testing my gun."

They got into the car, Sylvie in back. Vincent maneuvered it around and they sped off through a heavy rain that lasted but a few seconds. It reminded Paul of his boyhood vacations in Florida.

"So you carry a gun, Vincent?" Sylvie asked in disbelief.

"Around here? For sure."

"Back in Paris, you don't seem like the gun type."

"But away from Paris, I can even swallow swords."

"If you don't mind, Vincent, let's level with her."

Vincent's expression didn't register disapproval and Paul explained what had transpired, ending with "Let's get out of here fast and I don't mean this place. I mean the whole damn island. Screw it!"

In the hotel lobby, the conversation was totally one-sided. Paul's words

gushed out as if he couldn't wait to get rid of them.

"When I took on this assignment, I never bargained for this kind of stuff. I've hunted for stolen treasures all over the world, six continents and never faced this. I'm calling Leon. Let's see when the plane can get here."

It was 6:30 p.m. when Paul got through to Leon. With uncharacteristic emotion he summarized what had happened, including Vincent's heroics. And, for the first time, he shared with Leon the questions he wanted more fully answered, but the more he spoke the more fired up he became.

"As you can imagine," Paul said, "I don't have good vibes around here anymore and I want to leave. When can the plane arrive?"

"I understand, Paul. It can leave from here anytime you want."

"Is *now* too soon?"

"Not at all. Ansel can be there in, say, six hours. Is that okay?"

"Okay. And Paul? I say this like a father. Anything worthwhile has its distractions, and some are more serious than others."

"Serious?" Paul countered. "You mean deadly. Yeah, that's it: deadly serious."

After Paul hung up, Vincent asked, "Well, did reading parts of the book help?"

"Yeah ... pretty much ... right up to the bit about 'screw it'. It's beautiful but I'm saying 'screw it ... we're outa here'!"

As for the list of questions and answers he wanted to provide Leon, he wasn't the least bothered by the relative failure to provide any specifics. They both knew, he felt, that Switzerland has a long history of providing a hiding place for investment funds and possible tax consequences; that the source in more recent times had been stolen Jewish assets during the Hitler years; and that a banking crisis now exists in the country.

On a different topic, he even wanted to inquire about its use of drones in assisting miners in making three-dimensional maps. Or in measuring gravel pits, quarries and landfills.

Paul believed that the questions of (1) stem cell research changing Switzerland and (2) Nazis and Vichy French leading a drive to create a master race were still open for debate. In their phone conversation, he hadn't downplayed either question. Nor had he offered the semblance of an answer, either way.

He then phoned Sylvie in Paris.

"At last!" she said. "It's been ages. You alright?"

He answered yes and furnished her with practically the same information he'd just given to Leon.

"I hope you heard me right, Syl. We're *leaving*

here. For there, not Japan. Not yet anyway. What's the hurry?"

"Well, my darling, I might as well tell you now. Just got off the phone with Leon and he said he wanted to break some news to you—probably disturbing. But he felt you weren't in the proper mood, so he asked if I'd do it."

"Disturbing?"

"I suppose it depends on how you look at it. Thatcher Drinkwell, the strictest of the histarians? He wants to talk to you. Says it's extremely important, but it would have to be in person."

"He wants me to travel to St. Helena again? Well, I don't know about …"

"Wait now, Paul. Let's make it 'us'."

"Us? What's that supposed to mean?"

"You *and* me. Remember how romantic it was last time?"

"Every detail. Which reminds me. I'll call as soon as I arrive at the Montparnasse. You're spending the night with me there." It was an order, not a request.

"You needn't bother. I'll be waiting in the room. I still have a key."

As had been the case with Argentina, Paul concluded he'd learned what he had to and doubted he'd return to either Germany or Switzerland again. For what? To get shot at? It had reached a point in his mind where he not only doubted he'd visit those countries again, he **vowed**

not to. He maintained his obligations had been met—those pertaining to stem cell influences and to locating the French cabinet— but because Leon had expressed some additional goals. Paul wanted to stay on the good side of *Gens de Vérité*. He would thus concentrate on the possible sarin attack and even Marlene. He still had some doubt about her intentions.

# Chapter 13

Knowing St. Helena was only three hours away by time zones, Paul put in a call to Thatcher Drinkwell's office.

"I understand you've missed me so much, that you'd like to see me again," he said. "But it's only been a year."

"You're a mind reader, Paul."

Their banter kept on for another minute or two until Thatcher emphasized how important it was for Paul to make the trip.

On the heels of Sylvie's reminding him of their last visit there, he was prepared to agree to the trip but preceded it with, "You understand that Sylvie will come along, just like last time?"

"Just like last time. Yes indeed. I'll make all the

arrangements and I promise not to bore you again with bird talk. You needn't work out the travel details like last time, either. I'll take care of it through Leon. And one last thing: just come right to my office. Once we discuss what we have to discuss, the rest of the time is yours. You can do an immediate about-face and return to Paris, or you can stay and enjoy yourselves here for as long as you wish".

"Okay then," Paul responded. "If all goes as planned, count on our arrival sometime on Wednesday."

He and Sylvie did spend the night together and after they awoke late the next morning, Monday, and had breakfast, they nearly echoed each other in saying, "Well, here we go—off to no man's land."

Three hours later, the R.A.F. plane landed on Wideawake Airfield on Ascension Island, the nearest it could get to Jamestown, St. Helena's capital. The airfield is a joint facility of the United States Air Force, the Royal Air Force and the BBC World Service Atlantic Relay Station. Paul remembered that the airfield had been used extensively by the British military during the Falklands War.

After a two-hour wait, they boarded a Royal Mail ship, and set sail for St. Helena, a seven-hundred-mile, day and a half trip. Last time, they were provided with separate cabins, but this time they roomed together in a cabin that contained a large bed, large window, two wardrobe units, an armchair, a dressing table with over-

lighted mirror and a bathroom with shower.

It wasn't long before Sylvie laughed while recalling Paul's last year recommendation to the ship's captain that they would have been better off having their plane fly directly over the capital and then they would parachute down. And Paul mentioned feeling as though they were part of a multinational secret operation during which friends were suspect, light fixtures were bugged and all strangers including military pilots and sea captains were possible espionage agents. But things seemed "looser" this time around, not only with faster relationships but also with each other.

As before, he picked up a flyer from a table outside the ship's galley. He'd been drawn to it because of its title, *St. Helena and Napoleon*. It, along with others dealing with services rendered on the island, was in a pile available to all passengers. Having written extensively about the emperor, he knew most of the information in the flyer but reread it anyway:

> St Helena, a British island in the South Atlantic, is situated 1,200 miles off the coast of Africa and 700 miles southeast of Ascension Island. The Portuguese discovered St. Helena in 1502, but it became part of Great Britain in 1673. The island is approximately ten miles by seven miles in size or about half the size

of Napoleon's home-in-exile, Elba. Rough and mountainous, it is composed mainly of volcanic wasteland. The highest peaks--Diana's Peak and Mount Actaeon—rise more than 1,000 feet above sea level. An area of past volcanic activity is Sandy Bay, which contains fertile soil, ideal for the island's fruit and vegetable production. Three columns of basalt in this area are called Lot, Lot's wife and Asses Ears.

The island's only port and village is Jamestown, the capital. Its population is about 5,600, principally Europeans, Africans and East Indians. Its main bay is called James Bay.

The chief crops are flax and potatoes. For a century or more, the flax was used to make mailbags for British post offices, but this process has declined because of the availability of cheaper synthetic materials. Other industries include fish curing and the manufacture of lace and fiber mats.

For many years, it was an important port of call for Portuguese sailors to replenish their supplies and to receive medical attention. At one time, both the British and Dutch claimed the island as their own as they visited it on their voyages

to India. In 1659 the East India Company colonized the island. Fourteen years later, the Dutch attacked and took over the island but the British retook it within six months.

Napoleon Bonaparte was its most famous resident. After his defeat at Waterloo, he signed a second abdication at the Elysee Palace. Three weeks later he surrendered himself to the captain of *H.M.S. Bellerophon*, which took him to Plymouth. From there, he embarked on the *H.M.S. Northumberland* bound for St. Helena, arriving October 15, 1815. He was allowed a retinue of thirty people.

Napoleon stayed at a small house, the Briars, while his eventual home, Longwood House, was being readied. Shortly thereafter he moved into Longwood and lived there until his death.

Three frigates and eight other vessels continually patrolled James Bay or were kept on standby. Gun emplacements and guard posts were established throughout the island.

A year later, Sir Hudson Lowe was appointed governor of St. Helena and it quickly became apparent that he

and Napoleon had little respect for one another.

Napoleon died there on May 5, 1821. The cause and manner of death remain in disrepute. Some claim he was poisoned by arsenic, either intentionally or by accident. Others state he died of stomach cancer, as did his father. He was buried in the island's Sane Valley where his body remained until 1840. It was then transported to Paris and currently lies in the Hotel des Invalides.

Paul and Sylvie were on deck, as the ship, in contrast to their last visit, took a southerly route into James Bay. Paul recalled its northern approach a year ago when, from a distance and in a hazy light, the island resembled a massive black iceberg. Not this time, however. Looking bright and cheery, the closer they got the more obvious its irregular upper border appeared, as did the "slit" down the middle where rows of whitish buildings were located.

They docked at midday on Wednesday. On its main and only thoroughfare, Napoleon Street, Paul hailed a cab and asked to be driven to the Police Service Building. It was located on a quiet side road, straddled by a small neat park and an empty lot. On the way in, Paul muttered, "Remember, this down here is all business, not pleasure."

Sylvie said nothing but her nod was accompanied by a sensual grin.

Inside, Constable Thatcher Drinkwell looked as though he had become younger. Perhaps it was his hair, which he had allowed to grow longer. Again, he wore a print short-sleeved shirt, khaki pants and a belt from which a holstered pistol dangled. Fair complexioned, he had sharply defined features and a faded tattoo of a bird on each forearm.

He was sorting out papers in a filing cabinet when, upon looking up, shouted, "You're here! Paul and … Sylvie … right?" He nearly dropped half the stack of papers in his hands.

"Right," Paul answered. "Tired, but we're here. We made it."

Thatcher moved past his desk to shake their hands and even kissed Sylvie on the forehead. He pulled over two chairs for them, then rounded the desk to take his seat on the high-backed leather one behind it.

"Well now," he said, "thanks for coming. May I offer you some coffee or tea? And will you be staying again at the Farm Lodge Hotel?"

"No to either, Thatch. But let me explain. The sightseeing here is fabulous. We can attest to that. And we'd like to stay, but you wouldn't believe our schedule. We should be in Japan right now, in fact, but we've squeezed this in. So as soon as we hear what's on your mind, we're off again. Hope you understand."

"Not a problem. I'm sorry to have put you through this but it's probably the most important development in my career—or anyone else's for that matter. The most crucial is a better way of putting it. The same *Argos* is at the pier. I'll make sure it leaves here when we say and unfortunately it'll take about 36 hours for it to reach Ascension Island. So right after you leave here, I'll phone Leon and he'll have a plane ready for you there."

"Good, good," Paul said. "Now what's with the most crucial development?"

"Okay, here goes. Remember the competing gangs when you were here last?"

"Sure do."

"Well, word is out that one of them is working directly for Japan's interests."

Sylvie looked at Paul. Paul's eyes fastened on Thatcher's.

The constable continued: "It involves destroying a single country. If it works, they'll tackle other countries. Hard to believe—real hard because you'd think that once it started, other countries would be able to put a stop to it … and even retaliate. But they say Japan's long-term goal is to bring an end to the world. Who's 'they'? Histarians. Many of them. I'd estimate about twenty. They all came here for a meeting. Word is that the gang started with the mid-90s Tokyo sarin gas attack as practice, but when they saw how violently other countries reacted to it—the whole world really—they abandoned the idea. And now

they're back into it. I know you're about to go to Japan. Could you see what you can find out? I'll have more background for you in a minute."

Paul was immobile. "If all this is true, they're moving slowly, that's for sure." His voice sounded wooden.

"All the more reason to get a hold on the situation. It's like a storybook plot, but they've given themselves the time to 'sophisticate' an operation. That's the word one of the histarians used."

"I'm just wondering, Thatch," Paul said, "don't we have any histarians in Japan?"

"Yes, but only one. He's completely opposed to what they plan to do ... gave the idea away to some people who claim he's 'nuts'. In fact those countrymen who heard of it simply dismiss it as a farce—so the scheme, if that's what it should be called—hasn't attracted much attention over there. And for years now, the schemers are quite content to go ahead with their plans while keeping it all under wraps."

Paul remembered hearing Harry Shapiro, the *New York Times* reporter, refer to extremist groups in Japan and that the founder of one of them, Asahara, claimed he was the first enlightened one since Buddha. Asahara stressed that only his devoted followers would survive a worldwide sarin or arsenic attack.

Sylvie was speechless and frozen with fright and Paul, who'd arrived at the Police Service Building in no mood for hyperbole, said, "It's completely ridiculous.

End of the world? Why?"

"Who knows?" Thatcher answered.

Paul felt tongue-tied but eventually came upon. "It's just too far-fetched. I'm not blind to what you're saying. Thatch. I'm just blind to believing it."

"Well," the constable said. "I don't want to be around if it isn't far-fetched."

Each of the men began another sentence at the same time. Thatcher's was the louder and Paul stopped in mid-sentence.

"And you haven't even heard the most preposterous of all," the constable said, "but you go ahead with your comment first, because what I'll be saying will take your breath away."

"I was about to ask 'And how do they plan on accomplishing this ... this extermination'?"

"Strange you should ask because that's what I wanted to bring up next. Are you ready for this? They plan on dispatching mini-drones simultaneously."

"Drones? I can't believe I was going to ask them about their innocent use."

"The mini-drones would be loaded with sarin combined with that dispersal agent, CR-23. Regular drones have a wingspan of about ten feet. These will be five feet. More can be stored away if they're smaller. And they've reversed the letters of sarin because it didn't complete the job in the Tokyo subways. They now call it 'Niras' and they're preaching that Niras is the name of a

Buddhist goddess!"

Slowly but surely, Paul had changed his attitude remarkably, wanting to allow for an intelligent, uninhibited conversation. "You mean to say that when a signal is given, drones take off and release the gas at precisely the same time?"

"Yes, that's the talk anyway."

"But there'd have to be loads and loads of them stockpiled in Japan."

"Yes, hidden in the caves and abandoned mineshafts over there. But mostly in other countries they tell me—like Denmark, Russia, Oman, Netherlands and England." By then, Thatcher was reading from a card. "And get this: if you line up the first letters of those countries, you get the word 'drone'."

"That's unbelievable!" Paul said.

"Sure is. Somebody in their planning team has got a sense of humor."

Paul's eyes took on a hunted look. "Humor?" he said. "I'd call it sheer contempt."

"If they mean it, we can at least call them the 'Drone group of countries'."

"But getting back," Paul responded, "I take it that since the Tokyo sarin thing—that's 15 or 20 years ago—they haven't given up and have been constructing more drones specifically for this mission?"

"Yes, thousands of them."

"But wouldn't word leak out that there are drones

scattered about?"

"No. How many people know that our histarians exist? Except another fellow histarian? Drones don't even **have** fellow drones."

Paul thought the simile was weak but let it ride. "Have they set a date?" he asked.

"Yes, on Buddha's birthday—next April or May."

Paul counted on his fingers and replied, "So we have about six months till then."

"That's about right."

Paul couldn't believe what he was hearing, but because of the seriousness of the subject he felt he had to ask at least a few more of the questions that were suddenly swarming in his mind.

But Sylvie beat him to the punch with a remark delivered like a teacher ridiculing two students. "Now, you don't actually believe any of this, do you?" She didn't wait for an answer and began to mouth a further comment but Paul waved her off.

"Who gives the signal?" he asked.

"Beats me. And the other histarians too. It's something we'll have to dig into."

"You have any idea how we can head this off?" Paul asked.

"No, not yet. Let's just hope and pray that they—whoever 'they' are—that they don't change their minds and deliver the gas sooner. That's something you might be able to find out in Japan. What I'd recommend, Paul,

is that you look up that single histarian there. He might be able to provide you with more information—and also lead you to the right people and places. His name is Tomi Hoshi, a top executive for the Takeda Pharmaceutical Company in Japan." He repeated the name for Paul to write down.

"Wait just a second, Paul. I have his business phone number in my Histarian Directory."

The constable consulted it, gave the number and said, "I met him once and I like him. Why? Because I trust him."

"You don't trust other Japanese?" Paul inquired.

Thatcher didn't mince words. "No," he said.

"So if I'm to follow your logic, Thatch, you don't like most of the Japanese?"

"Let's just say that because of Pearl Harbor and how they treated their prisoners—and their adversaries in general—I'm leery of most of them. So be careful."

Paul deliberated before saying, "Sorry if I sound nosy, but I want to be as prepared as possible before going there."

Paul then revealed a change in plans. They would leave for Tokyo, not Paris, and he would confer with David before they left. "Maybe he'd even be willing to come along. So could you notify Leon that we'll want to leave from Ascension for Japan, not Paris?"

"Will do," Thatcher replied.

"In the meantime," Paul said, "and I'm sure you

know this better than me ... than I ... let's keep all of this under wraps. If there's something you should know immediately, I'll phone you from there. If it can wait, I'll call as soon as we get back. It'll no doubt be from Paris."

Thatcher floored them both when he responded, "After you finish in Japan, if you feel a top level meeting would be in order in Paris, give me the word, and I'll attend."

# Chapter 14

Paul returned the surprise when he asked. "Is there a library around here?"

"A library? Yes. a well-stocked one. It's on the other side of the empty lot next door."

"Does it have some of the top newspapers, like those in the U. S.—*The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal*, for example? And written in English?"

"I'm sure it does. What's up your sleeve, may I ask?" Thatcher looked bewildered.

"Oh, just a little research. I hope they keep old issues."

"I've been in it many times and can vouch for that. The entire basement is where they keep past editions. The reporters are always looking for details of old stories."

"Then that's where we're heading. Hate to make it

sound impersonal, but I think we're about done here. So if you can arrange it with the *Argos* in, say, two hours, that would be great. And regarding a top-level meeting later—I'd say in Paris—yes, you can count on it. As soon as possible after Japan. I just hope I learn some things that will help matters. Maybe even some individuals besides that Mr. Hoshi will attend. Depends, I suppose, on the trustworthiness Sylvie and I see in them."

After exchanging best wishes, the constable nearly flew around the desk to give each of them an unusually prolonged embrace.

Once in the car, Sylvie said, "I didn't want to ask in there, but what's with the library?"

"You'll see."

The library building was more then twice as large as the Police Service Building. Inside, in addition to stacks of books, the well-lighted facility displayed table after table of books and pamphlets written in different languages. Several patrons were seated randomly and reading newspapers that were fully opened and covered their faces.

As Sylvie separated from Paul to leaf through a book or two, he casually rounded each of the patrons to assess what he could of their expressions. Were they really reading or hiding? Feeling as though he was a marked man, he did so instinctively, and queried himself as to what he'd do if there were any doubt. For as he proceeded, he realized he was unarmed.

Two female librarians were busying themselves at the main counter. Paul finally walked up to one of them and asked in his most innocent voice if they carried *The Wall Street Journal* and/or *the New York Times*.

"Ah," she said, "the U.S. Yes, of course. Right over there in the bottom row of the rack."

"No, I should have clarified. I mean old editions."

The librarian appeared momentarily taken by surprise before saying, "Yes, down those stairs to the basement. Everything's clearly marked, but would you like someone to accompany you?"

"No, that won't be necessary. How far back do they go?"

"We keep them for about a month and then discard them."

"Good. That'll be plenty. We won't be too long. We're doing a paper and we'll each just be writing down some headlines. Thank you."

Sylvie joined him and as they descended the stairs, he said, "This may prove to be worthless but it's worth a try. I want to know what they're writing about Japan. So let's split up the papers and copy down just the headlines about Japan."

He checked his watch. "Shouldn't take long. Before we end up in Tokyo, if one or two of the articles need reading, we'll manage it somehow. Don't ask me how though."

He let his eyes wander around and said, "Maybe

the headlines will be enough. The thing is, Syl, I haven't been reading about Japan every day."

"Anyway, the headlines alone will make you sound as if you know what's going on there," Sylvie said. "You're so smart."

They thanked the librarian again on the way out and once in the car, Sylvie handed over her notebook. Together with what he had written in his, he read the headlines aloud. There were 22 of them.

"What I plan on doing before taking off for Tokyo," Paul said, "is to go over this list a few times, just to familiarize myself with what's on their minds over there. Then I've downloaded some Internet stuff … just an article or two … three actually … on their standard of living; on the country's postwar history; and on the five good and five bad things about living there … in the opinion of one who moved to Japan four years ago.

"One thing I'll definitely **not** initiate with anybody is their recent problem over the reliability of some of their stem cell research. I understand some of it is erroneous but unintentionally so. I'd best leave that alone."

"I agree," Sylvie said.

Paul backed the car out and within minutes on the main road, a small black truck heading their way swerved toward them, nearly forcing the car off the road. He had to brake hard to keep it from skidding down an embankment.

"Jesus!" he cried out with a fist aimed at the truck,

which raced on past them.

His breathing accelerated and Sylvie patted his knee.

"Good job," she said.

"Good or bad," he countered. "who knew I was here ... or we? Someone on the Royal Mail ship from Ascension Island?"

Sylvie made light of the near collision, but for Paul it reinforced his feeling of being a marked man. An international marked man.

"Could you hand me my satchel, Syl? It's in the back seat. Better still, I'm keeping two hands on the wheel. Just grab me a few crackers."

She complied and he munched away.

Before long, he said, "How about we have lunch at the Farm Lodge? Remember? It's a nice place."

"Sure, but didn't you just fill up on the crackers?"

"I never fill up on crackers. In fact, the more I eat, the more I want."

Sylvie reached over and kissed him on the check. "You're incorrigible," she said. "Okay, let's stop there. I think it's about ten minutes away."

They headed down a metal railing-lined road. The sights were exactly as Paul remembered them from before. They drove past the renowned "Jacob's Ladder"--a seven-hundred-step climb to a fort above, past a bird sanctuary that Thatcher always bragged about, an elongated tree-fern thicket, deep stretches of grassland,

rows of sunflowers and an occasional foreshortened redwood.

The air was uncomfortably warm. Sylvie reached around to open the back windows and that together with Paul's veering up a steep slope to higher ground made the air more tolerable. Stark contrasts came into view: lush pastures, bare slopes, flax plantations, sea cliffs. It had all become an unplanned sightseeing event and even included Ladder Hill, the Governor's Turtle Residence and the Half Tree Hollow site. Paul identified them aloud as they sped past them.

"Together with Jacob's Ladder, have you ever heard such titles?" he asked.

"I wonder what they call a public lady's room," Sylvie commented.

Paul ignored the statement.

The Farm Lodge Country House Hotel appeared to be a misnomer, for it was 90 percent restaurant and 10 percent sleeping quarters. They both agreed.

After greetings for the owner, they were escorted to a small square table near the rear of the building. The place was relatively empty of diners at the time, approximately two p.m.

"Ideal spot," Paul said as he settled Sylvie into her seat, then sat next to, not opposite her.

"Alone, quiet and all that. Perfect place to have a wine or two and then I'd like to bring up what's been bogging me down by the minute."

"Bogging?"

"Okay—bothering."

"You don't want to start now—before the wine?"

Paul replied instantly. "No, my thinking is hardly intact and I want to give you the entire picture in an organized way. So maybe some food and wine will help. Right now, my thoughts are about as organized as people rushing out of a New York subway for the start of work each morning."

"Hey, that's not bad, Paul. At least your imagination's still intact."

"I'm baffled, that's all."

"Bogging, bothered, baffled," Sylvie said with a glimmer of love in her eyes.

A waitress arrived, pad and pencil in hand.

"I'll have a Chardonnay to start with," Paul said.

"Make it two," Sylvie said.

He gulped and she sipped. He signaled the waitress for another and they both ordered the same food: a bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich and a small dish of salad with blue cheese on the side. No dessert.

They spoke little as they ate. Paul ordered a third wine and Sylvie nursed her first. She could easily tell that he was concentrating more on thinking than eating—or even drinking.

The waitress drifted away as if she knew they wanted privacy. And Paul began to speak in almost a whisper, a hardly noticeable slurred whisper. He said he'd reached

the point where the only person he totally trusted was the one he totally loved. And he wanted to level with her over a variety of issues that were beginning to confuse "the goddamned hell out of me."

"There are … just too many," he said. "So what I've done … and I began … the other day … and hope I can present things in an … an what? … an understandable way."

A few more words followed: apologies, indistinguishable names and the like. It was as if he were testing out what Sylvie would comprehend with time.

As he continued and apparently gained more confidence, the slurring stopped. "I separated them out and attached labels or answers or questions to them—all brief. I know them all by heart so I don't need notes. Are you ready for the list?"

"Ready."

"One—Argentina, Germany, Switzerland? No more visits. Two—Stolen folders and stem cell influences? Completed. Three—Remaining? Japan visit. Seek out histarian guy. Discuss possible sarin attack. Our next move. If we announce it to the world, such an attack may come sooner than April. Other issues there. Four—Follow-up on Marlene. Five—On return to Paris, high-level conference. May include coalition of histarians from Argentina, Switzerland, Germany and Japan. Maybe even representatives from Homeland Security, the CIA, FBI and Interpol. And six—Questions. Again,

Marlene. Also the prior.

Gaining Sylvie's approval of the list, Paul said it was now necessary to bring Leon up to date and "reluctantly to call David and ask if he'd be willing to meet us in Tokyo. Should I?"

"Why do you say 'reluctantly'?"

"Primarily because it's a long way from the States."

"Don't be silly, Paul. He's done as much traveling as we have—probably more. Besides, he said he wanted to help you any way he could. Go ahead and call."

"Okay, you talked me into it. He'll be a great asset."

Sylvie let a half-smile betray her belief that he would have called David, no matter her response.

Paul rose, then sat back down. "Let's see," he said. "Time wise, it's about five p.m. in Paris and about noon in New Haven. Think I'll start with Leon in Paris. And don't get too bored with the conversations … over the details of what we've learned here especially. Just think of how bored I'll get the second time around."

"Don't worry about it, darling. Just go ahead."

He phoned Leon first and laid out everything he could remember about the trip. It wasn't until Paul got to the topic of mini-drones that Leon said a word, and even then, he seemed far from overwhelmed—to Paul's way of thinking. He was beginning to equate his own level of concern over this … concern over that … with other

people's reactions. He knew it, understood it, but didn't like it.

"All the more reason for a high level conference," Leon said, and agreed it should take place "as soon as you get back from Japan."

With regard to David, Paul was pleasantly surprised to hear that, despite a sprained ankle, he would look forward to a flight to Tokyo. "That sarin stuff?" David said. "My hunch is that it's exaggerated, but we can't take a chance. It's too delicate a situation."

The two worked out travel times and where they would connect in Japan. One of David's closing statements was, "With four brains at the helm, we'll defeat the entire threat."

"Four of us? There's you, me and Sylvie. Unless you're counting the histarian over there."

"Oh, I forgot him. So make it five."

"I don't quite get it," Paul said.

"Yours and mine are three."

# Chapter 15

With Thatcher's input, the *Argus* was ready for sailing as soon as they arrived at the pier at seven p.m. It was a small Greek freighter that hauled packaged lumber and containers along with roll-on/roll-off vehicles. There were no other passengers on board, but the crew of six was the same as those who manned the vessel the year before. There were no games or lectures aboard ship, so for 36 hours, they took frequent naps and entertained each other just as frequently. In addition, Paul had time to review all the information he had on Japan.

Each of the crew—all fluent in English—spent considerable time with them, exchanging stories and jokes. One in particular, an older man named Markos, was the friendliest of all, and ate with them at every meal. The dining area was a continuation of the galley

in its metallic composition: steel walls, steel floors, steel tables, steel benches.

One morning, about halfway to the island, Markos called Paul aside and said through cupped hands, "I doubt if you noticed, but we're sailing off the usual course. I don't know why the captain does it that way, but it happens every so often. Only thing is that this time it seems more off course than usual."

Paul tried to make light of the news by saying, "Maybe he's already had a drink or two," but he could feel the pangs of his hypochondriacal side beginning to take over.

"Should one of us speak to him about it?" he asked.

"No, he gets easily annoyed when anyone questions his decisions. Let's hold off awhile."

Paul shared the information with Sylvie, tagging it with, "Here we go again."

"What's that supposed to mean?" she asked.

"Oh, the usual. It doesn't sound very innocent to me."

"Paul, will you stop it? Did Markos seem concerned?"

"No."

"Then you shouldn't either. There's enough to drive you crazy in that head of yours as it is, so stop it! Promise me?"

"I promise."

As it turned out, Markos did speak with Captain Gianakis and was assured that the sailing pattern, though different, wouldn't affect their destination or arrival time. He chalked up the route change to simple boredom over past sailings to the island.

It was a monotonous day-and-a-half trip, the more exciting phase occurring whenever the two of them reconstructed parts of what had occurred last time on the ship.

"You made a play for me, Syl, even though I was taken—and you knew it."

"I did nothing of the sort … I was just searching … there was nothing better to do … I got tired of the sun."

Paul labeled her talk a matter of guilt. "See," he said, "you can't even complete a sentence about it."

"It's ancient history anyway. I have you now. So my approach worked after all."

"Yes you do, and so it did." Paul cast an uncertain smile. "You know the part I remember most vividly?"

"What's that?"

"When you said 'if you ever become untaken, I'll still be in Paris' and I said 'You mean like Bogey and Bergman and we'll always have Paris'?"

They arrived at Tokyo's Narita International Airport at a decent hour, neither one having commented on time zones, flight time or anything else having to do with traveling. They had both learned that the more they

complained, the longer a trip took. There were four or five refuelings and it was now 4 p.m. Japanese time.

They asked around and learned in curt but respectful language that many fine hotels were located in a number of very attractive districts. They settled on the one that David had recommended: Akasaka, which, they were told, was a district that boasted a "lion's share of swanky, up-market hotels—many of which counted as attractions in their own right." They registered at its Ritz-Carlton—again David's choice. He had stayed there on a previous trip.

Paul didn't know why, but he'd expected to see different city sights in and around the hotel, yet there were none. Not the ancient Buddhist temple Senso-Ji or the Thunder Gate, an ornate pagoda and a famous shrine—all of which he'd read about. But he later learned they were in a different section of the city. There were the usual tall buildings, officers directing traffic, and throngs of hurrying people associated with any large city, especially at that time of day. The only difference was the pattern of their faces.

Upon signing in, Paul was told that David had already arrived and was assigned a room opposite theirs.

Once in their room, Paul phoned Tomi Hoshi at the Takeda Pharmaceutical Company. It took three recordings and three live voices to reach the vice-president in charge of publicity, once an instructor at the Newhouse School of Public Communication at Syracuse University.

"Hello, Tomi?"

"Yes, they said it was you, Paul. Thank you for traveling all the way here. I hope it will be worthwhile. As a matter of fact I know it will, because we have a crisis on our hands that has to be confronted head-on." He sounded like a Harvard grad, not Syracuse, in Paul's opinion. But articulate and friendly enough.

"What is it with all the contacts I'm making?" Paul asked. "I go to Argentina and many there speak English better than I do. The same for Germany or France or Switzerland or you name it. And now, the same thing here."

"Thank you. Maybe it's one of the reasons I was hired. I've been with the company more than 20 years."

"Well, it seems you're well suited for it."

"Thank you again. Where will you be staying, incidentally?"

"We just checked in at your Ritz Carlton."

"Excellent choice. Let me say right off, Paul, that I'm at your disposal. Are you available right now?"

"Absolutely. There are three of us. Besides me there's Sylvie Ranet—she's my one and only—and David Brooks. He's a medical doctor but more of a treasure hunter now."

"Yes, Leon's told me about them. Looking forward to meeting all three of you. I can go there or you can come here. Whatever."

"I've never been inside a pharmaceutical facility, so

we'll go there. Can you alert those at your front desk?"

"Certainly. I can show you around and, if you're interested, I'll discuss the industry itself. Just highlights … it's what I do regularly."

"Good. Then we can get down to business." Paul clenched his teeth before amplifying. "Sarin gas and such," he said.

At Takeda, a huge nine-story structure, a good-looking man was seated at a small table near an immense front desk that spanned the entire width of the building. He was making notes on a clipboard. At least ten individuals were spread out behind the desk, each busy with individual tasks.

Paul sauntered up to the table and said, "Tomi?"

The man rose and said, "Yes, and you're the three who made it here in record time. Seems as though we just got off the phone. Welcome to Takeda." He shook their hands while bowing slightly.

The most striking thing about Tomi was his height. He was the tallest of the four at probably six-three.

"I know, I know," he said, "I'm tall for Japanese. Maybe that's another reason they hired me: I can reach high shelves for ingredient bottles." They laughed in unison.

He had straight black hair with only an occasional strand out of place. It made his eyes appear black as well. Flat-faced with unusually rosy cheeks, his warm smile was enhanced by a slight gap in his top teeth. He wore an

American-style double-breasted suit and striped tie.

They briefly exchanged small talk, Paul trying to match the depth of Tomi's deep voice.

Finally Tomi said, "What say we start?" And began leading them away.

Paul called him back, saying, "Wait! Before I forget, I want to express my regrets about that jury ordering your company to pay ... what is it ... 6 billion in damages over your Actos diabetes drug?"

"And Eli Lilly ... 3 billion," Tomi said. "It's all political and a lot of nonsense in my opinion and will be resolved amicably. But I appreciate your consideration. You do keep up, don't you?" There was no malice in the question.

"I try, especially if I read something important about a country I'm about to visit."

"Good for you ... I'm impressed. Now I should have started as I usually do instead of rushing us off to see things." He led them into a tiny side room and arranged chairs in a circle.

"I'll begin with what I term an industrial overview, and here is where India comes in. About 50 years ago, the pharmaceutical industry was relying heavily on imported machines from India for their processing and packaging needs. Other foreign countries had a stranglehold on the market, but today the Indian manufacturers have turned the tables with their market share close to 75 percent. They're now the fifth largest producer of drugs and

pharmaceuticals after China, your country, ours and Europe in general."

As usual, Paul was taking notes. He was feeling both comfortable in Tomi's presence and also uncomfortable because of their soon-to-be-held discussion about the sarin threat. It was as if he were a double person: a public one listening to a relative outsider and a private one with the future of the world weighing heavily on his shoulders. Under current circumstances, he included the shoulders of David and Sylvie. It helped, but only a bit.

The vice-president continued: "Now I can talk about what we call pharmaceutical machinery or just the industry in general. Which would you prefer?"

Paul answered as if he'd just come out of a trance. "Maybe talk about the industry … and show us a sample floor for the machinery part."

"Fine. I'll start off by saying the industry is an important part of the health care system throughout the world." He looked at David. "Correct, doctor?"

David nodded.

"And now, what I think I'll do is simply go through a list of applicable terms. Within this part of the discussion, you'll get a good idea of what we deal with here—and others elsewhere. Also let me remind you that I've repeated this list over and over for other groups, and for many years. I need no notes and hope I can hold your attention."

Tomi got up, stood stiffly with his arms folded

behind him and began with the engrossed look of a diamond setter.

"There are a total of 20 important terms I can cover, but because I'm just as anxious as you are ... I'm sure ... to get to the real reason for this get-together, I'll only cover ten of them—in alphabetical order. And I must credit author Keith Tait and the *Encyclopedia of Occupational Health and Safety* for what I'm about to say:

**Biologics** are bacterial and viral vaccines, antigens, antitoxins and analogous products, serums and other blood derivatives for therapeutically protecting or treating humans and animals.

**Bulks** are active drug substances used to manufacture dosage-form products, process medicated animal feeds or compound prescription medications.

**Diagnostic agents** assist in the diagnosis of diseases and disorders in humans and animals. Diagnostic agents may be inorganic chemicals for examining the gastrointestinal tract, organic chemicals for visualizing the circulatory system and liver, and radioactive compounds for measuring the function of organ systems.

**Drugs** are substances with active pharmacological properties for humans and animals. Drugs are compounded with other materials, such as pharmaceutical necessities, to produce a medicinal product.

**Ethical pharmaceuticals** are biological and

chemical agents for preventing, diagnosing or treating disease and disorders in humans or animals. These products are dispensed by prescription or approval of a medical, pharmacy or veterinary professional.

**Excipients** are inert ingredients which are combined with drug substances to create a dosage form product. Excipients may affect the absorption, dissolution, metabolism and distribution in humans or animals.

**Over-the-counter pharmaceuticals** are drug products sold in a retail store or pharmacy which do not require a prescription or the approval of a medical, pharmacy or veterinary professional.

**Pharmacy** is the art and science of preparing and dispensing drugs for preventing, diagnosing or treating diseases or disorders in humans and animals.

**Pharmacokinetics** is the study of metabolic processes relating to the absorption, distribution, biotransformation, and elimination of a drug in humans and animals.

And **Pharmacodynamics** is the study of drug action relating to its chemical structure, site of action, and the biochemical and physiological consequences in humans and animals.

Paul and Sylvia were stupified.

"Very impressive," Paul said. "How on earth can you do it?"

"That's what I'd like to know, too," Sylvie chimed in.

David appeared only mildly interested.

"If you do it for years, before years of groups, it just comes naturally. I remember early on when I would even say it in my sleep. But now, shall we move about?" Tomi asked.

"Maybe just to your busiest floor," Paul replied.

"Right above us then," Tomi said. "Let's take the nearby elevator."

They left the room, walked a short distance, entered an elevator, and upon leaving it, each of the visitors inhaled as if seeing a Tyrannosaurisn dinosaur.

"My god!" Paul exclaimed.

They were on a balcony and below them was a series of immense spaces filled with speedy conveyor belts; men and women—at least a hundred—wearing white coveralls and caps and tending to what Tomi identified as rapid mixer granulators, double cone blenders and tablet counting machines. Some of the workers even wore masks.

"This, right before us, is the tablet section." He pointed off in the distance, about 50 yards away.

"Over there are the capsule, ointment and liquid sections," he said.

"No sarin section, I hope," David commented.

"Are you kidding, doctor? Of course not. But as long as you brought it up, let me say, here and now … so as to get a head start on our discussion in my office … that such a dreadful agent was developed in Germany

in the late thirties. They were really counting on a tough pesticide. Tough all right. It turned out to be the most volatile of the nerve agents and kills within seconds. It's reportedly 26 times more deadly than cyanide. And would you believe it: even the Nazis chose not to use it during WWII."

By this time, Paul was growing impatient, and he could tell David was, too. "What say we get to your office for our so-called powwow?" Paul asked.

"You got it," Tomi said.

Purely American, Paul thought.

Tomi requested that they follow him into an adjoining corridor and eventually ushered them into a massive office. Its walls were filled with photographs of the building and schematics of various chemicals. All the furniture had a dark brown hue and any table or desktop bore a sheen that reflected anything above it.

Tomi signaled them to join him in a corner section that had four easy chairs arranged in a square.

David wasted little time. "Tomi, I'm here primarily for moral support, so Paul will lead and if I'm quiet, please don't take it one way or another."

"Ditto," Sylvie said.

"I understand, but do speak up whenever either of you feels it appropriate," Tomi responded.

"Our purpose," Paul began, "is to investigate Japan's attitude regarding … the aftermath of the war … I guess is the best way of putting it. But also to learn

anything we can about sarin gas. You know about the possible attack, I hear?"

"You hear right. Two years ago, we had a taste of the world's end—at least Japan's world—when that earthquake, tsunami and nuclear combination happened. It was just north of here and many people unfortunately lost their lives. I want no part of it for the whole world.

"But let me stress: I'm not one of those who's uncomfortable about having lost the war … yes, we *lost* it … but it was all our fault to begin with. However, our country is tired of being apologetic to the U.S. and it wants to know what to do about it. Forget it, I say. But that was then and this is now. So with your approval, let's dispense with all that and get on with what to do about a possible gas attack. I assume that takes precedence over anything else."

All three nodded their approval.

"Good … well, not good … but … well … you know what I mean."

Tomi tugged at his ear and checked his clipboard before continuing: "First of all, the most important information I can give you here and now is that there's a sizable group of Japanese citizens calling itself 'The New Kamikazes.' And they want to end the world. I'm not in the least associated with them although they've tried to have me join with them. You've heard of the original kamikazes, haven't you? During the war, they were members of a special corps in the Japanese air force

and were charged with suicidal missions against U.S. war ships. Their airplanes were filled with explosives."

Paul nodded in agreement as Tomi went straight ahead as if his mind were burdened with death and destruction and he wanted to rid it of them.

"Secondly, we have to send word out to all histarians that there may be mini-drones hidden right under their noses. They must identify the areas but keep it all a secret, just as the new kamikazes are. Or they might move up the date of release."

Paul thought he'd offer something appropriate. "I think I know of the areas we should concentrate on—unless it's all a joke, or a tease. When you used the word 'group' awhile ago, it reminded me of it. Some of the histarians at a recent get-together in St. Helena said they somehow learned that the group of countries that will be initially hit are ones whose first initials spell out 'd-r-o-n-e'. Isn't that something? Denmark, Russia, Oman, Netherlands and England. As I said, they may be pulling our leg but the histarians don't think so, because it took some doing to find it out. Anyway, we can call it the 'Drone Group'. And I don't think I have to stress that any arrests and apprehensions must be as precise, uniform and simultaneous as their planned release—only earlier."

"Pretty clever about the countries they're targeting," Tomi said, "and makes it easy to remember."

"If it's all true," David kicked in.

"Well, so far this is all basic stuff," Paul said.

"But here's that word again— a group of us—mostly histarians—is meeting in Paris some day next week and we'd like for you to be there, if possible."

"Possible? I'll be the first to arrive. Just phone me with the date, time and place."

"Great," Paul said. "Is there anyone else from here who should attend?"

"No … afraid not. I'm on the outs with just about everybody who's not keen on my points of view, and I'd bet they wouldn't believe me anyway."

"I see," Paul said. "The last thing we must bring up is sarin itself. Without getting too technical, what can you tell us about how it works, its composition, and where it's produced or kept?"

Tomi didn't equivocate. "I'll start at the end. It can't be kept very long. Two weeks at most. It's a colorless, odorless liquid that can be used as a chemical weapon owing to its extreme potency as a nerve agent. It can be produced at any pharmaceutical factory and it works by suffocation from lung paralysis, unless some antidote is quickly administered. Typically atropine. Those who absorb a non-lethal dose but don't receive immediate medical attention may suffer severe and permanent neurological damage. They might as well be dead."

By their appearance, a sickening feeling benumbed both the visitors and even the host.

Paul was the first to rise. He held out his hand to Tomi, who in turn held his out to each of the other two.

"Tomi," Paul said, "you've been extremely helpful. I for one get a sickening feeling just thinking or hearing about it all. And I think we've gone far enough for now, if you don't mind."

"I completely understand."

"So at the risk of sounding rude, let's simply end this and consider it a miniature version of the meeting we'll have in Paris," Paul said. "Thank you so much."

"You're welcome. Good luck and I'll see you there."

# Chapter 16

Although Paul considered the Japanese visit a success and that a simple phone call would not have left as indelible an impression of what was happening there, he promised himself he wouldn't visit another country except in the case of a dire emergency. Or if it happened to be France. Or if his livelihood depended on it. And it didn't equate with getting rich either—just a livelihood.

Offhand, he further concluded that the one country that would sneak by most easily as an emergency would be Argentina. Specifically Buenos Aires because of his good friend, Captain Joe Gomez.

They left the Ritz-Carlton early the next morning and the airport shortly thereafter. The R.A.F. pilots knew they wouldn't be staying in Tokyo very long. Rather than their returning to London and flying back again, they

explained they had special Japanese quarters reserved for them whenever they landed in the country. Paul dropped the issue.

Back in Paris on Monday afternoon, Paul phoned Leon and expounded on the entire Japanese adventure, as he called it. Leon congratulated him several times during the call and strongly urged that they get on with the planned high-level meeting.

Paul agreed and said, "I suggest we meet at the Meridien Montparnasse. For a hotel that size, it has unusually large conference rooms and they have several of them. So I'll reserve one of the larger ones. For when? Let's make it Friday and I'll request that it be simply set up. You draw up a list of those who should attend—if you don't mind."

"They should be mostly histarians, especially from the Drone Group," Leon said. "And Thatcher, of course. And your pal, Gomez. Also representatives from Switzerland and Germany. Then there's you, me, Sylvie and Vincent. How about some from Homeland Security, the CIA, FBI, Interpol? Should they be represented?"

"I'm not sure. They're not histarians."

"But neither is Gomez."

"That's true. Well, make out the list and we'll finalize it later today. We have to give them some time to arrange for it at their end. Hate to sound bossy, Leon, but you can ask Thatcher for specific names from his Histarian Directory."

"Just thought of another one," Leon said. "Dom, the prior?"

"Too feeble."

By 7 p.m., Leon called back and said he'd contacted all he thought should attend the meeting and that every one of them agreed.

"I haven't done so with Captain Gomez though. Maybe you should do that. I have the names of the histarians who'll be there, but as for Interpol, the FBI, CIA and Homeland Security—they all said they'd no doubt send someone but didn't give any names.

"Boy! They sure did put me through the ringer in making certain this is legit. I'm not even certain they understand all the circumstances. In fact, they minimized everything I was telling them."

"Maybe that's just the way they handle things. They're probably bombarded with things that turn out to be false alarms."

"You ready with pencil and paper, Paul?"

"Yeah—I have both a cluttered mind and a cluttered notepad."

Leon then read off the names and countries, inquiring intermittently if he were going too fast and receiving a negative answer:

"Denmark: Karl Larson
Russia: Boris Stepovich
Oman: Saffa Yusuf

Netherlands: Ben Geis
England: Radford Plummer
Germany: Emil Bauer
Switzerland: Deiter Steinhaus
Japan: Tomi Hoshi"

"And then I took the liberty of inviting another histarian. He was recommended by Oman's Saffa Yusuf. His name is Paddy McTammany. He was born in Scotland but years ago moved to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, smack in the middle of Africa. It's a country that was called Zaire in the past. McTammany is not quite 60 and is a graduate of the Agriculture Department of Nelson Mandela University."

Leon was reading from a card. "He owns a corn plantation roughly 50 miles east of Kinshasa. He's definitely an histarian, and guess what else? He's what Saffa calls a pygmy. But many in that region are like that—black and pygmy.

"Anyway, he has some news he's been holding in for some time—Paddy, that is— and he wants the committee to hear about it. This is unreal, Paul, but I'd rather **he** tell the story because I'd only mess it up."

"That's fine," Paul said, dwelling more on the number of attendees. "Including the four of us, we'll have a committee of 13. Lucky number."

"You're right. Why don't we just forget those government people? If they come, they come. I assume

they'd know enough to keep things secret."

"Actually," Paul said, "they already know the gist of the meeting—judging from your calls to them."

"True, but they don't know the details. And who would they go to if they or their superiors wanted to know more? You or me."

"So you told them I'm in on running this, too?"

"Yes. I shouldn't have? Is there a problem?"

"Not really. The CIA and I clashed once over who had jurisdiction over some stolen goods I located. They finally admitted I was in the right, but they didn't take to it lightly."

Paul couldn't remember the last time he had three plus days that were free of obligations. It was Monday and the meeting was scheduled for Friday. Catch up on paper work? More time with Sylvie? Or whatever else he thought of, he supposed, but he wouldn't rush things. It was near imaginary. That is, until his invitation call to Captain Joe Gomez.

"Yes, I will attend," Joe said. "But Paul, I was going to wait till I got there before giving you some … well … shocking news. But as long as you're on the phone, I might as well tell you now. There's a lady down here who drops your name everywhere she goes. Associates you with Germany, Japan and Switzerland; says you're an authority on their history and that you may be somehow involved with what they're still doing

with Jewish possessions. I just met her recently and was told that for each of the past five years she's lived four months in Germany, four in Japan, and four in Buenos Aires. Her name is Marlene Kesler and she promotes herself as a modern version of Evita. She's trying to get ahead with important officials here—in government, in education, in cultural circles. How? By giving them what they want, when they want it. She talks a good game but she's a whore; that's what she is. Sorry, Paul, but you'd better come back down here and have a talk with her. I think it's that important."

Paul was floored by the news, saying only, "A courtesan. I thought so."

"A what?"

"Courtesan. A high-level prostitute. In her case, a high-level multinational prostitute. She even came onto ***me*** when I was in Germany."

"So you do know her?"

"Only in passing. She tried her best, but I did my best."

"Well, as you may know, prostitution is legal down here in most areas as long as no solicitation occurs within 500 meters of a school, church or residence. Still, her throwing your name around is an insult, if not a crime. Whether you know it or not, Paul, you're held in high esteem in these parts."

"I'm not sure why—probably because of my close friendship with you—but in any event … let's see, travel

tomorrow ... there Wednesday ... travel Thursday ... meeting here Friday. I think I can fit it in this week."

Paul, weakened by the whole development, thought out loud: "I'll take care of that bitch."

"By the way," he said, "how'd you meet her? Don't tell me she tried **you** out."

"No. We met at a local gathering of police officials. She marched in as if she was a guest of honor. Believe me, she wasn't. So she approached me, introduced herself and handed me her so-called business card. Besides her local phone number and even the German and Japanese numbers, know what's printed right in the middle of the card?"

"Not 'Sex for Hire'?"

"No. 'Escorting Services'. But I kept the card and you can call when you get here."

It was late Tuesday afternoon when Paul entered Captain Gomez's office. He placed his satchel and a small traveling bag in a corner before they shook hands. They thanked each other, one for delivering unspeakable news, the other for traveling a great distance under such pressure. Both were standing, hands on hips, eyes narrowed speculatively.

"You'll call her right now?" Gomez asked.

"You bet," Paul answered with the determination of a starved coyote. "Where should we meet?"

"Right here. I'll leave the room if and when she

arrives." He gave Paul the business card.

A familiar voice answered the phone call: "Escorting Services. Marlene speaking."

Paul strained to keep from spewing insulting language. "Hello there. It's me, Paul D'Arneau. I'm here in Buenos Aires and was wondering if we could get together tonight." He was all but certain she would take the request with something sexual in mind.

"Paul, my friend! Why of course. You name it and it's yours."

He was right.

They set the time for 8 p.m. and she agreed to meet at Gomez's office, "providing we're alone."

"I'll make sure of that," Paul said.

Immediately after Paul hung up the phone and got permission to be alone when Marlene arrived, the captain said, "Are you ready to hear something else about her?"

"What now?"

"Since our call yesterday, I did some research. Found out some things about this babe that will blow you away … excuse the pun … but I was told this by someone I know very well and who happened to use her services. Before she took care of him, they were sitting at a bar and she had too much to drink—and no doubt said too much."

"Can't wait to hear this," Paul said. "Carry on."

"She brought up the subject of a new breed of Japanese kamikaze pilots."

"I've heard about them … just the other day. Hell bent on ending the world."

"That's them, according to this guy. Well, whenever she's in Japan … four months at a time … she handles their desires. Screws or sucks. He said she's constantly busy. They even wait in line for her."

Paul wondered about his hearing acuity and even about what an appropriate comment should be. Finally he asked, "And what does she get in return?"

"They fly her anywhere she wants to go."

Paul sat alone in the captain's office at precisely 8 p.m., his satchel at his feet. Five minutes later Marlene arrived. She carried a small cream-colored handbag with two cell phones visible in its end pockets and was dressed in a sheer sheath over a deep-cut red blouse with gaudy shearlings. Her platinum hairdo was ramrod-straight. She said nothing as she slid a chair to within an arm's length of Paul's and provocatively unlaced her red stiletto boots.

Her words were slowly delivered. "So good to see you again, Paul. What did you have in mind?"

"I'll start by saying I can have you arrested on any number of charges. Look! Stop using my name … for any reason, in any way, at any time, in any place. That goes for Japan, Germany, Switzerland, down here … **anywhere**. You hear me? You can be put in jail, and there goes your little shebang."

"What do you mean by 'shebang'?

Far from charming as in Germany, she became steely and remote, as if dealing with a robot.

"Maybe instead of 'she-bang', I should say 'you-bang'."

Marlene quietly laced up her boots and then responded, "I understand what you're implying but you're all wrong, and even if you weren't, it's none of your business, sir. I resent your accusations."

She cleared her throat before resuming at a louder level. "What I do here … or anywhere … and I repeat … is none of your damn business."

"It **is** my business when my name is brought into any talk during your … your … encounters. If there ***is*** any talk."

Marlene grabbed her bag and stormed out of the room.

Paul removed a handful of crackers from his satchel and began munching on them. He phoned Gomez at his home, said he would leave the key to the office with the receptionist, thanked him for his help and looked forward to seeing him at the conference on Friday.

# Chapter 17

The most significant part of Paul's flight back to Paris was when he took the time to recap what had occurred in the past two weeks and a day. He figured he'd covered more ground during that time period than ever before, in hopping here and there, in saying this and that, in worrying over things that never panned out. He decided to think things through and write down what needed no further attention and what remained on the horizon. Done and To Be Done.

As it now stood—mentally, psychologically, emotionally, however one would put it—he felt nearly as helpless as when he was once held captive in the caves of Gibraltar.

He opened up a new notepad and printed:

DONE
Locate stolen cabinet of stem cell folders
Address Swiss banking issue
Visits to France, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Argentina, St. Helena, Japan
Hearing about two murders: Kesler and Durand
Witnessing one murder: Swingeth
Chastise Marlene
TO BE DONE
Meeting about drones and sarin
Await retaliation from Marlene, if any

It hadn't taken long. Eleven lines of words and he felt better. It served to tie things together after going off in many different directions, receiving advice from many different people, and accepting responsibilities he hadn't counted on. The whole two- week ordeal had seemed like a movie with sickening subplot after sickening subplot, and the simple act of doing what he had just done turned out to be the best remedy.

He and Sylvie slept well together that night, and even though he was dog-tired, they made love as if it were their first time.

Friday morning arrived as sunny and windless, more like a mid-summer day than one in early October. The all-important ten o'clock meeting lay just ahead. On the way to the conference room, Paul was nearly knocked

over by Leon as they rounded a corner. Sylvie lagged a tad behind.

Paul beat Leon to the door and flung it open. Every person at the extra-long table rose and clapped as the three of them entered. They in turn clapped back and before taking seats near both ends of the table, walked person to person, thanking them for attending.

Leon knew them all personally; Paul about half. All who had been invited were there except for the various government officials or their representatives. Leon told Paul that he wasn't surprised, and Paul nodded.

Except for the table and 13 straight-backed chairs, the room was devoid of any other furniture. All shades were drawn and there were four silver trays spread along the table, each containing a pitcher of water, several empty glasses and some white napkins. A single piece of paper and a pencil lay before each attendee.

Because they were all engaging in conversation, the meeting didn't really get underway until 10:15. Leon sat at one end, David at his side, while Paul sat at the other end, Sylvie at *his* side. Paul could tell by Leon's expression that he should start the meeting.

"First of all," Paul said, "thank you for coming—a **great** distance for most of you. But we have a **great** reason for meeting this way and I know you're all aware of the importance of this get-together. And what it will be all about. Hopefully we'll have a clearer understanding of what needs to be done, for the sake of our individual

countries and really for the whole world."

No one took his eyes off him and three or four jotted down key words without looking at the paper before them.

"Oh, before I forget," Paul said, "we haven't arranged for coffee or tea. That was my decision. I felt it might serve as a distraction. But afterwards we'll have lunch or dinner here, depending on how long we take to decide on what to do, when to do it, et cetera. This might sound rigid but please, anyone with a question or comment, raise your hand first and either Leon or I will acknowledge you."

Several hands went up. There were no comments and the common thread of most questions dealt with one of the two men—or both—outlining the extent of what one labeled 'our emergency'.

"That's exactly what it is, I'm afraid ... an emergency," Paul said.

"And the faster we act, the better," Leon said. He continued by reviewing points about Japan's intent on ending the world, the possible use of sarin to accomplish the job, and the deadly use of it 15 years before in Tokyo.

He paused to allow Paul to pitch in. He told of his recent visit to Japan and of the chemical nature of sarin, stressing that it's a liquid that changes into a gas before killing in a matter of minutes.

"Many of you already know this, but conventional

wisdom tells us that the Japanese intend to deliver the stuff through the use of so-called mini-drones, which some faction has been constructing and storing for years. And I use the word 'storing' advisedly.

Paul and I feel that our primary job is to find out where those drones are kept and to destroy them, because when you come to think of it, who cares if they have a supply of sarin? If they can't deliver it, what good does it do them?"

With that, Leon raised his hand and said, "This is as good a time as any to introduce a fellow historian from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Paddy McTammany. He was recommended to me by Saffa over there and what I believe he'll tell us may be the solution to all of this. If we can pull it off. Why not stand, Paddy, and enlighten us?"

Paddy stood and was not black but was a pygmy of sorts, under five feet tall. His smile was of the nervous variety and he kept both hands in his pants pockets. He was dressed in a brown but somewhat wrinkled jacket and a darker brown tie.

Consulting notes, he removed his eyeglasses and began by saying, "First off, I thank you for allowing me to be here so you can hear my tale. Something that never upset me at first but has after I came across Oman's Saffa about six months ago. We attended a farming convention in Yemen and got to know each other. One thing led to another and he spoke about the reason we're here—but

in general terms. Japan and sarin and the end of the world definitely came up."

He stopped to fill a glass with water and drank all of it in large gulps before saying, "My country used to be called Zaire, most speak French and I'm told it's the poorest country in the world. It's right in the center of Africa and our home is about an hour's drive east of Kinshasa, our capital.

"I've been a farmer all my life, on a plantation my wife and I love. It's not too far from the beginning of a rain forest with interesting vegetation and all kinds of animals. You name it and it's there. Sometimes they wander up to my vegetables and I have to shoo them away."

David raised his hand and asked, "Most of them are visible to the naked eye?"

"Yes, sir. All of them. When I drive through the forest, I have to be careful not to hit any of them with my Land Rover."

Paul knew that David—the "zoo-man" as Paul would sometimes refer to him—would eventually bring up the subject of animals. They exchanged knowing glances.

"Well," Paddy said, "that's enough background. Here's the important part of what I want to say. About two years ago, a friend and I drove completely through the forest for the first time in years. Once in a while, I'd drive into it for a short distance for no special reason.

Just to get away from things, I guess. But the road you take starts right at the edge of our farm and if you go the whole way through the forest, you see that it suddenly comes to an end. Then there's acre after acre of flat wasteland … I'd call it. About a mile from there, we came upon two giant boulders at the edge of a plateau, and at a much lower level beyond that, we saw a big abandoned building about 300 yards away.

"The space between the boulders was only about two feet so we had to leave my truck and walk down to the building. This was two years ago, mind you. The building looked very old from a distance. Falling apart. Once we got there, we walked around it. In the back, we noticed that two separate additions had been added to it, probably recently because the wood looked new. They had windows at ground level and we peeked in. Guess what we saw. Crate after crate of what I now understand are mini-drones. Crate after crate, I tell you. From floor to ceiling. Hardly any walking space. They were **hanging out** of some of the crates. I'd guess there were thousands there because they were piled all the way throughout the old building, not just the additions.

"We both thought it was some kind of military installation so we didn't bother with it. It was out in no-man's land so we didn't think much of it at the time. But now … now … it's a different story. Can they be what we're all worried about? Now … right now?"

Another hand went up. "Were there any guards

there?" Denmark's Karl Larson asked.

"No. None."

"How do you think they got there?" another asked.

Leon responded. "A good bet? Repeated helicopter landings. You said the land was flat, right, Paddy?"

"Right, but at a lower level. It's like a crushed stone parking lot."

"But why pick that location?" Sylvie asked.

Paddy answered as if he'd anticipated the question. "I have a one word answer: remote. Maybe two words: remote and deserted. And probably no government official to get permission from. I even doubt if any official has ever been there."

By 11:30, each attendee had asked at least one question or made a positive statement. The one thing that had come through loud and clear was that something must be done as soon as possible.

"What I'd suggest," Paul said, "is that a couple of us visit the site to make sure it's still there."

"I'm willing to go with you," David said, "for that obvious reason, but also I'd like to visit the rainforest and see the animals."

As an aside, Paul said, "He's very involved with a zoo back in the States, folks, and I hate to speak for him, but he and Zeb Eliott, the curator, are thinking of adding a miniature rainforest on the zoo property. Was that okay to divulge, David?"

"Sure, as long as everyone here understands that our

primary goal is to see if the building is still there and, if so, to destroy it as quickly as possible."

"To blow it to smithereens," England's Radford Plummer said, without first raising his hand.

"So all of you in favor of those two checking out the place, say 'aye'," Leon said. They all did.

"What we can do is this," Paddy said as soon as his hand was lowered and he eyed both ends of the table. "You can fly to Kinshasa, land at the N'djili International Airport there and I'll be waiting in my Rover. Then the three of us can drive to our plantation, maybe have a light lunch and, after that, I can take you through the forest, if you don't mind a bumpy, rocky dirt road. I can explain what we'll be seeing as we go along. That might help with your zoo plans, David. It's about a five-mile drive to the other end of it. About two miles east of there—beyond where the building is ... or was ... another rain forest begins.

"Perfect," David said. Paul nodded his approval before asking when they should meet.

"Tomorow," Paddy replied.

"The R.A.F. can have them there at, say, 10 a.m.," Leon said.

The meeting was brought to a close and all 13 retired to the hotel's mid-sized restaurant where they were treated to lunch, courtesy of Leon. Afterwards, he assured them they would be informed of what Paul and David found on their journey to Africa.

# Chapter 18

Sylvie approached Paul and registered her approval of what he and David would soon be doing along with an admonition that they be careful in the rain forest.

Paul assured her they would be and said, "You know, Syl, our overriding mission is to check on the building. That, I understand … but in a way, I share what I'm sure David is thinking, even as we speak. Lately I've been feeling too scientific, too weighed down with all the things I'm sure you're tired of hearing about.

"So truth be known, I'm really looking forward to escaping to unpretentious nature, even for less than a day—to its frankness and simplicity—pristine and primitive. To a place as primordial as any remaining on the face of the earth."

"I've never heard you speak that way, my love. You

sound like a poet."

"Well, I mean it. It should be quite an experience."

"Yes, it should be. And I trust Paddy. You'll be in good hands."

David wandered over and, like Paul, reminded them that their principal errand would be to look over the building. "Is it still worth bombing?" he asked.

"If it's still standing and still housing mini-drones, then it is," Paul said.

As they passed by the meeting room, David said, "You don't think it was out of line to bring up the zoo thing, do you?"

"Not at all," Sylvie answered. "They seemed quite interested."

"Good," David said. "I could have elaborated that there are several mock-up rain forests in several zoological parks around the U.S., which I could learn from. Also, I've read *Tropical Rainforests* cover to cover and consulted with my buddies at National Geographic in Washington, but there's nothing like sizing up an original."

He waited for a reaction from the other two and when none appeared forthcoming, he continued: "The only negative I can see is the humidity and all the rain on both sides of the equator. But the area is stratified."

"Stratified?" Paul responded.

"There are layers of large trees on top and as you go down, you get to smaller ones and shrubs of all sizes.

Hope we can duplicate it. And on the floor are fungi. We'll skip that. In the real world, so to speak, they decompose things. It's worked beautifully for millions of years. There's a great lesson there in ecology and adaptation and I'd wager that Paddy will bring it up."

Early the next morning, Paul and David left for the N'djili Airport in Kinshasa, about two hours away. Each had taken along a satchel stuffed with necessities, including a change of underwear and socks in case they decided to stay overnight. The plane didn't taxi to the terminal but stopped on the tarmac where Paddy could be seen waving excitedly.

On leaving the plane, they were met by an oppressive wall of sultry air and Paul thought of what it must be like in the rain forest. Worse? Or better, because of the forest's shade? Should their clothing have been scant, such as shorts and a light sport shirt, or must they be fully covered to protect against insects and various vegetation? Earlier, both had agreed upon "fully covered": very thin khaki pants and long-sleeved shirts that were just as thin. They also wore wide-brimmed hats.

The two travelers and Paddy shook hands firmly and then embraced as if they'd known each other and hadn't seen each other for years. They slithered into the rusted Land Rover and headed for the plantation along an uneven road. Twice, Paddy swerved sharply to avoid a parade of secretary birds, his tiny feet working the built-up pedals from his built-up seat. Even at that, he

was barely able to see over the dashboard.

"Men," he said, "what would you think of this? We'll have a bit of a meal—my wife insists—and then we'll head for the forest."

The men were in agreement.

"Fine," Paddy said. He sounded professorial when he added, "I'm anxiously looking forward to imparting to you as much information about the African tropical rain forest as I possibly can: its history, its strata of trees and epiphytes, its habitation as well as the influence Man is having on its very survival. Incidentally, David, I didn't bring it up at the meeting but I enjoyed your essay in *Newsweek*."

"The one on host resistance?"

"No, on ecosystems."

"Thank you. I'm sure you could have written a better one."

"Not at all, doctor. But I did identify with the warning you issued."

"Which was?" Paul asked.

"That if something isn't done to stop 'Man's Intrusion On Nature'—I believe you called it—then all the world's primary tropical forests will disappear within 85 years."

David returned to the conversation by saying, "That's based only on the effect of large-scale logging and the blasted sophisticated machinery that's available these days. A hectare of trees can now be removed in two

hours. That's 20 acres a day. I just did the arithmetic and came up with roughly 85 years."

"That's just logging, right?" Paddy asked. "I imagine if other 'intrusions' were considered, it would be more like **60** years."

"Could be." Paul chipped in. His spoken words, though less than those of the other two, were delivered at times when he felt almost "out of it". But it was David who was more interested in nature, ecosystems and the like, he reasoned. In reality, Paul was more preoccupied with the status of the mini-drone building.

Paddy's wife was most gracious upon their arrival at the plantation, but indicated she was due back at her popcorn shop and asked to be excused. She did leave a large platter of assorted sandwiches, potato dishes and homemade corn fritters.

After lunch, David said he thought it appropriate to elaborate on what he had in mind regarding his zoo.

"Understand," he said, "the drone building facility takes precedence, but as long as we're here, it'll be a great benefit to what we have in mind back home. We'd like not only a mock-up of a rain forest but alongside it a reproduction of a desert and a savanna—which other American zoological parks don't have. It's not a case of one-upmanship either. I just believe it's more natural and more instructive to depict what actually exists in harmony.

He began sketching on his paper napkin.

"And I came up with the schema ... if you can picture it ... of, on the left, a tropical rain forest and next to it, going right, open woodland. Then, a savanna. And to the right of that, widely scattered thorn scrubs and tufts of grass and, finally, to the far right, a typical desert. That's the way it is in nature, and I'd like our facsimile to be as close to that as possible."

The others glanced at the well-torn napkin.

David carried on. "I've already consulted with an engineer about enclosing the rain forest itself in order to control temperature and humidity. We're talking about New England here. Tough winters. Ice. Snow. But we can leave the other areas open."

Paddy gestured his approval.

"In case you're wondering, our zoo may not yet have everything, but what we do have is land. A Mrs. Whitlock, the same lady who financed practically every nearby building in one way or another, has donated hundreds of acres of adjoining flatland to the Beardsley Zoo Corporation. Only hitch is, she expects the desert to be named the Whitlock Desert. Doesn't quite have the ring of a Sahara or a Mohave, does it?"

"David," Paddy said, "I think that's an admirable undertaking, and you can count on us whenever and wherever we can help. Speaking of that, I'll be right back."

He disappeared into the next room and returned carrying two small revolvers. "Here," he said. "I know

you couldn't bring them aboard an airplane and, who knows—you might need them before the day is over." They thanked him and inserted them in their satchels.

In the Rover, they started their trek to the nearest rain forest northeast of Kinshasa. It would take less than an hour over Paddy's shortcut through the unpaved roads of the outback.

It didn't take long before he resumed his professorial presentation. "Right here in the Congo River basin, we're actually in a savanna. And let me point out that savannas are large tracts ranging from wooded grasslands to plains with little or no vegetation. Anyway, just as you outlined in your presentation earlier, David, the savannas lie between tropical rain forests and deserts.

"Picture a map of Africa. The equator cuts across it roughly in the middle. Straddling the equator is the rain forest. South of it—where we are now—is the Miombo Savanna, and south of that is the Kalihari Desert. Now, north of the equator is the extensive Sudan Savanna and north of that is the great and famous Sahara Desert. Have I been clear or did I confuse you instead?"

"Clear and no confusion," David said.

"Same here," Paul said.

Paddy, looking satisfied, resumed the discussion. "More than a third of Africa is savanna. Most of it is very dry, and because of that we have many raging fires, although some are deliberately set to clear the land for farming. There are plenty of swamps, lakes and

marshes though.

"Look, quickly, over there." He pointed to a cone of soil, taller than his Rover. At its base was an aardvark, rummaging about.

"What's that?" Paul asked.

"That's a termite mound. Their saliva holds the soil together. There are millions in there but the aardvark will eat a good many of them."

Paddy paused to break up the formality of lecturing, but only for a moment or two. "Last thing I'll say about savannas is about its animals, because, David, you can place some of them in your imitation savanna."

David perked up.

"You can divide them into three groups: the plant eaters, like giraffes, elephants, rhinos, elands, zebras and gazelles; the famous hunters of the plains, such as lions, leopards, cheetahs and hunting dogs; and finally, the scavengers, like the jackal and the hyena, or the vulture."

"How about tigers?" David asked.

"They prefer the rain forest itself."

Paddy remained silent for the remainder of the drive to the rain forest except to point out some acacia trees armed with their sharp thorns and an eight-foot tall ostrich blazing over the horizon.

The edge of the forest came upon them abruptly, if not officially. There was no entrance per se, no admission booth, no attendants and no beginning trail. There was

just a hidden narrow passageway that someone other than Paddy would probably have missed.

He never stopped or slowed down. Tree branches and vines swallowed the Rover as it ploughed into the thickness of the forest. Dense underbrush scraped across the vehicle's sides.

Paddy stopped the Rover and said, "Now, if you look ahead, you can get a good idea of stratification. See? Start at the top. That's called the 'canopy layer'."

He pointed straight up toward the largest trees. "They're called 'emergents'. That's about two hundred feet up to there. The canopy cuts out the sunlight from the forest below. And it's known for its great diversity of fauna."

"I should know," Paul said, "but 'fauna'?"

"Sorry," Paddy responded. "For its diversity of animals and birds that stay there. It's their habitat, their home. Most animals hang around where their food is and, in the canopy, there are many flowers and fruits and nuts. Beautiful orchids and wild pineapples. Different kinds of monkeys. Flying dragons."

"Dragons?" Paul nearly shouted.

"Sure. And even flying foxes."

David took out a pad and made a few notations.

"Now," Paddy said, "next down is the middle layer, or understory. It's hard to see from here because it blends in so well. The trees are about half the size of those forming the canopy, and their crowns aren't nearly

as dense. Leopards and jaguars, and orangutans, chimps and monkeys like this spot.

"Next comes the shrub layer. You can see it easily, there ahead. Those are shrubs and saplings. Look at all those different kinds of squirrels.

"Then finally the ground layer. Notice there's no grass there; just some fern that doesn't need light. Tigers like that environment and so do Congo mice and snakes and tortoises, and even any of the others who don't feel like climbing or swinging … or never had to learn—such as the antelope.

"That reminds me of a wonderful example of adaptation over the centuries. Some of the other animals roving around on the ground are much smaller than their cousins out in the open grasslands. They've adapted to a size more convenient for maneuvering among the closely spaced trees. For example, the forest elephant of this country is far smaller than the African bush elephant.

"And, believe it or not, there are also many humans living in there. Itinerant pygmies constantly on the move as hunters and gatherers. They live today just as they did generations ago in such a simple balance with nature."

"No hi-tech, no taxes," Paul said. All three shared another laugh.

It was humid and dark because the clearing was covered by overhanging branches of nearby canopy trees. The smell there was like any damp, dark area augmented by rich vegetation and occasional wafts of

orchid epiphytes. It was not offensive.

The chatter of birds filled the air and one could hear variable intensity levels of howling, growling and baying—of animals either safely off in the distance, or else frighteningly close by.

David surveyed reflections in the glare of the headlights—eyes of unidentifiable animals, peering through the brush—spread out on both sides: some blinking, some not: some round, some oval; some slanted upward, some slanted downward; none moving, all staring.

"I'm sure the loudest can see us and the others can smell us," Paddy said. Just after a silky lynx darted past them, he shifted to high beams and they set off into the depths of the forest with no clear roads or paths in sight.

If Paul or David were able to see ahead from any vantage point—from above, from below, from either flank—their smiling expressions belied the fact that neither could have navigated more than a few feet at a time. But Paddy, with only the upper poles of his eyes managing to see over the Rover's hood, and his foreshortened legs flitting from accelerator to break pedal, forged ahead with his old jalopy, clearing trunks and stumps with mere centimeters to spare. He pressed on the horn every hundred yards or so, "to awaken and scatter" as he phrased it.

The ruckus of chirping and howling diminished around them, but Paul was not convinced he felt safer

for the three of them. Paddy swayed wildly but forward, both hands grasping the wheel, teeth bared, staring straight ahead. Paul envisioned a professional racer. *All he needs is a pair of goggles, a leather cap and a flowing white scarf.*

Without warning, as they squeezed through a narrow passage in a dense tangle of vines, plants and bush, the vehicle was pulled sharply to the right. It stalled and they looked at one another. Vines covered the windshield, blocking Paddy's view. He pumped the accelerator several times before turning the key off and on.

Finally, sputtering at first, the Rover restarted. Paddy backed up from the entanglement and—each of them at once horrified—gasped and recoiled from the sight before them. Perched on the right side of the hood, wrapped around the radio aerial and oversized side mirror was an enormous snake.

"A python!" David uttered, covering his mouth to keep from shouting.

With markings resembling those of a diamondback rattler, including shiny dark blotches edged in yellow, coils upon coils of snake were piled high enough to obliterate the whole height of aerial and mirror. Its tongue flickered as it knocked against the windshield.

"There's a machete behind your seat," Paddy said, trying to sound calm. "It's on the floor."

Paul twisted around onto his knees, took hold of the weapon, jumped out of the Rover and raced around the

back to the passenger side. He eased alongside the hood and began slashing away and was soon out of breath. He handed the machete to David who had followed close behind. He took over the slashing.

Paddy, too, was not far behind. "How long is it?" he stammered.

David answered, "Never saw one this big. Must be 50 feet."

He was wrong. There were two twenty-five footers. No one had realized it yet but the one on top had been hacked to pieces while, underneath, its mate lay intact and still. Waiting.

Paddy moved the other men aside and began to lift away the dismantled python. Suddenly, the snake below separated its jaws and snatched Paddy's left arm, suctioning it into his mouth up to the little man's elbow! The strike was so swift, Paddy had no chance to emit a sound.

The rest of his upper extremity, including his shoulder, dripped with the snake's saliva as it now began a more deliberate swallowing action, centimeter by centimeter. David knew it could lubricate its meal up to a foot ahead of its working mouth.

His immediate thought was that Paddy weighed, at most, 90 pounds. He edged around the door that the others had partially blocked and, straightaway, grabbed the python with his left hand to slow it down, and with his right, grasped a tubular structure sticking out between the

two parts of the snake's lower jaw. His fingers vibrated as he squeezed it. The snake writhed violently.

"Hold on, Paddy! Hold on!" David shrieked. He felt the python's power tucked under his left shoulder, and now, he was on the hood, atop and astride the giant snake.

Paddy groaned as he struggled to extract his arm from razor-sharp teeth alternately imbedding and releasing in his flesh. The two others pulled on Paddy apparently unaware the snake's teeth were inclined in the opposite direction.

As David continued to compress the tube, he felt the snake gradually relax, and then its mouth, once tight around Paddy's arm, loosened enough for him to yank out the arm, a bloody mess but, nonetheless, free! The second snake was dead and David released his grip.

"Rock pythons, my friends. Forgetting the blood, are you alright, Paddy?" He put his arm around the trembling pygmy.

"Yes, at least I have feeling. Maybe too much." His voice was weak.

David and Paul removed the remains of both snakes from the hood, and they left the machete behind.

"Any alcohol or something like that on board?" David asked, opening and closing his numb right hand.

"First-aid kit 'neath the dash," Paddy said.

David pulled out the kit, opened it and found a bottle of zephiran chloride. "Better than alcohol," the

once-practicing doctor said. He cleansed the few teeth wounds on Paddy's arm and assessed that his injuries were not as serious as he'd expected.

"Try to get a tetanus shot in the next 24 hours," he advised, and gave him a drink of warm lemonade he found in an old thermos.

"Pretend it's bourbon," he said. Paddy smiled and looked more relaxed.

David handed Paddy three Tylenols and asked, "Want me to drive?"

"No, no, David. I'll be fine in another minute. Meanwhile I can ask you: what was that … that *thing* you were squeezing?"

"The snake's windpipe. Pythons have a unique mechanism to keep from suffocating while they swallow big things. Their lower jaw consists of two bony parts and they can push out their windpipe between them. So it stays protected. Meanwhile your arm occupied the space between the upper part of the lower jaw and the upper jaw itself. Get it?"

"No disrespect intended but my arm wasn't 'occupying'. It was being eaten!"

"That it was," Paul said, his first comment in some time. But he was certain he'd be saying plenty before the afternoon was over.

"One other thing, David," Paddy said. "How did you know what to do?"

"Hey, after years and years … and, yes, tears …

associated with our zoo, they didn't give me the moniker of 'Snake Impressario' for nothing, you know."

Paddy then flexed and extended his arms a few times and said, "Okay, let's go. The rest of the forest awaits us."

After driving a couple hundred yards, Paddy slammed on the brakes, leaned back and turned to stare at David for a moment. He said, "Thank you, my friend. That was … that was … well … just pure bravery."

"Here, here," Paul said.

Paddy still kept his eyes on David. "It was as impressive an act as I have ever seen, doctor. I watched your agility in the face of danger, but I also saw your face. I believe it was an American author who said—now let me get this straight—'His doughy face reflected the earthen simplicity of heroism'."

"Thanks, Paddy, but I'm afraid the doughiness is right here and not in my face," David responded, patting his stomach.

On the rugged road again, a road only Paddy could make out, he said, "Too bad the snakes had to be wasted, wouldn't you agree?" He looked in the rearview mirror for any response.

"Yep, they also help preserve the balance of nature," David replied.

"Don't snakes help in medicine, too?" Paddy asked.

"For sure. We need their venom to produce anti-

venom. And some neurotoxins in their venom are used right at our medical center to help us study complex nerve proteins."

"Good to hear snake blood is used to help science," Paddy said.

"Not blood, Paddy. Venom."

"Oh yes, I mean venom. And there's something else. Those pythons could have been my relatives in past lives. At least my religion says it's possible."

"I suppose that's a posibility," Paul chimed in.

Paddy then deadpanned, "That's okay, though. They were probably on my mother-in-law's side!"

They drove on for more than an hour, Paul continuing to make a few notes, Paddy very professorial about the surroundings. At one point, he stopped to check a front tire, leaving his door wide open behind him. Paul scrambled out to slam it shut.

More than once, Paddy had to ease the Rover around marshes and small lagoons, their waters infested with alligators of all sizes. All three recoiled at the sight of scorpions crawling here and there—*on* the vehicle but not *in* it.

"We're almost at the end of the forest," Paddy said, checking his watch. "Not bad timing, considering. I'd like to end up by touching on the future. Every three seconds, a portion of the original rain forest … the size of a football field in your country … disappears, as man cuts down trees or burns vegetation. Making more

farmland. Shifting 'slash and burn', as it's called, plus excessive logging, present the greatest threats to this natural resource. Plant and animal species also suffer, remember.

"Over near the Ivory Coast, for example, shifting agriculture and overzealous logging are wildly out of control and, in the past 12 years alone, two-thirds of its forest have been destroyed. A pity. I won't bore you with more depressing tales but just wanted to alert you to such a sad state of affairs—saddest for those of us who relate so harmoniously with nature. And I assume that means each of us."

"Indeed," Paul said.

Some kind of guy, David thought. What's he doing raising corn in the middle of Africa?

Within minutes, Paddy announced, "The end of the forest is just ahead. As I remember, the flat wasteland starts, and about a mile from there are those two boulders I mentioned at the meeting with a narrow opening between them. Wide enough to look down. And I really mean down. Can't drive past that but we can look through or walk the rest of the way. The building, if it's still there, is about three or four hundred yards away from the boulders.

Paddy stopped the Rover a considerable distance before the boulders and turned off the motor. "Let's walk from here," he advised. They exited the vehicle and walked slowly and quietly up to the boulders and

looked through.

If hair had the ability to stand on end at the sight of an unexpected scene, theirs would have. The old building was still standing and an apparently new one was next to it with mini-drones almost falling from its windows. Nearby was an idle helicopter.

But even more surprising was that both buildings were encased in a barbwired fence and not too far away was an iron cage that housed six German Shepard dogs who were fast asleep.

"Listen," Paul whispered. "I hear voices." Soon, two men emerged from the newer building. Neither looked up toward the boulders and they seemed to be arguing. They appeared to be Japanese and were dressed in gray army fatigues with black boots enwrapping their lower legs. Each of them had a small caliber gun holstered to their midsection while a large rifle with bayonet was strapped diagonally across their bodies. Then, more talk emanated from the building but no one else came out.

None of the three said a word, but their absolute silence spoke volumes. Paul felt as though he was either the tin-man, the scared lion or the scarecrow in a late scene from *The Wizard of Oz*-—when they were atop a mound looking for Dorothy.

Paul had removed a camera from his satchel before leaving the Rover. He managed to take a half-dozen pictures of the area before them.

Then he and David looked at one another and

simultaneously looked at Paddy, as if they'd seen enough. They walked back to the Rover and drove away, none saying a word about their discovery.

Once inside the vehicle, Paddy said, "I know a shortcut to the plantation without going through the forest again."

David began making some notes.

Paul munched on crackers.

Paddy indicated they could be put up for the night at his house, but they preferred a nearby small hotel. Their return flight to Paris was scheduled for the following afternoon.

At the hotel, Paul phoned Sylvie and Leon, relaying as many details about their journey as he could remember, including the python episode. But it was the mini-drone buildings and their guards that drew the most questions and comments. Leon's was the firmest: "That does it. We bomb. Sure, there are people there, but not as many as in the whole world. I can arrange for RAF Typhoon fighter jets to do the job. I'll check with Paddy on the exact location.

"It's too bad. It would have been poetic justice if we were able to use regular drones. I've already consulted with some Swiss friends who use drones to measure gravel pits, quarries and landfills. Even with a Japanese company that uses them in industries like mining, construction and spraying pesticides. But the maximum altitude of a drone is only around 2,000 feet and that

might lead to a problem or two in our case."

Paul was listening with just one ear because he knew about the general uses of drones and his mind had become centered on those who had met at the Montparnasse Hotel.

"Wait though, Leon," he said. "I think it would be a good idea to notify all the committee members about what we found. Can you call or email them? Handle it any way you wish, but I'd ask them to answer 'bomb' or 'don't bomb'. Also, I took some pictures of what we saw, so if any of them wants to see any before giving his answer, I can forward them to him. You could have him add to his original answer: 'pictures' or 'no pictures needed'."

Leon replied: "After all you went through, what you're saying is the least I can do. We have only a two-hour time difference, so I'll phone you at ten in the morning, your time."

While David was sleeping late, Paul and Paddy met early the next morning at the hotel's quaint breakfast nook. After exchanging good-natured ribbing about what Paul called "their exploits on the rain forest speedway" and what Paddy called "an interruption in a python's dinner," they settled in for discussion, each putting on a serious face.

Paddy started. "Now let me see," he said, stroking his forehead. "Just as you could have read some more

about deserts and savannas and rain forests, or you could have consulted with friends and experts over the phone or through the mail, you instead determined, and quite correctly, that the flavor of it all would have been missed. You had to see for yourselves. And I'm sure you now have a better handle on your next course of action."

Paul nodded with intensity.

"Well, I'm not a city person," Paddy said. "And the hunger and homelessness we have in Africa, at least in *my* part of Africa, are not the same that exist elsewhere. Many of our bush people or tribesmen may become hungry for a short spell because they're not in the habit of storing supplies. And they don't necessarily go to the store to buy food either. They just kill prey as needed, to be blunt about it."

Paddy stifled a cough and paused to check off something on a scrap of paper he had referred to. It had only three or four lines scribbled on it. Paul caught a glimpse of one line. It read: "Do something about it."

"Now, Paul, if you put a thatched or cardboard box on a side street in one of your cities, people would look at it and immediately think 'homeless'. But here, that's routine. That's how most of our people live and they're perfectly happy."

Paul poured another cup of coffee for them both and said, "I never really thought of it that way."

"Precisely. That's the point. You in America don't always have accurate images of African life and some

of us don't know what it's like there either. So in your case, you came to the Congo not only to check out that building, but also to improve on the image you had of rain forests. You came to the source."

"Why can't you come to the States and pose as a homeless person for a night?" Paul asked.

"Think of it. Me, a pygmy, out on the streets of New York City. I'd get squashed into the ground before dawn arrived!"

Paul gave his customary "hmm".

"So I'm going to the next best source," Paddy said.

"What's that?"

"Not what. Who."

"Alright. Who?"

"You."

"I don't know if that's the next best source, Paddy."

"Oh, but it is. I've heard of your humanitarian interests from many, many histarians, and I've read some of your articles on the hungry and the homeless. There is no one, I'm convinced, with the passion you have for this sadness."

Both persuaded and flattered, Paul said, "So you want me to tell you all I know about those subjects?"

"Not really, because you could probably talk for days. Just … like … a synopsis."

Like? He's become Americanized, David thought.

Information then poured from Paul as Paddy bowed

approvingly, even as he sat.

"Homelessness and hunger must be considered together because virtually all the homeless are hungry, too. There's an exception, though. Some of those living on the brink of poverty may suffer from hunger even though they might have a home of sorts. But let's concentrate on those without homes because the vast majority go hungry, also.

"Yes, I understand," Paddy said, his facial expression beckoning for more.

"In the States at least, the homeless are everywhere: parks, street corners, back alleys, abandoned buildings, tenement stoops, beneath stairwells, inside dumpsters."

Paul elaborated, covering every aspect of life for street people: cardboard, old newspapers, bags, rags; tattered clothing; winos; frigid weather; pneumonia; winter shelters; soup kitchens; needles, drugs, prostitutes, AIDS; muggings; killings. He spent nearly an hour on them.

"Not a pretty picture, Paddy. Now then, this might sound simplistic but I believe it's accurate: regarding causes, at the core of the problem are education and family. If there's a weak structure or no family at all, or if we have a school dropout or a person who cannot compete, either because of subnormal intelligence or because of another mental disorder—well, many of these unfortunates end up on the streets. Then the real trouble begins. They hang around idly, become bored,

and eventually many turn to dope and booze. If they had a job, they lose it. Next comes prostitution and other crime; they have to support their habit. And just as many of them get hooked on alcohol and drugs, they also get hooked to the streets. Often there's no escape."

There was a brief period of silence, which Paddy broke.

"Paul, I can't help with prevention, but through the network I hope to create I'll make it a high priority to provide dollars to help those sorry people."

"Don't forget, 60 to 80 percent given to many humanitarian organizations winds up in administrative costs and there's also a fair amount of outright embezzling, too," Paul said.

"But I was hoping if we got off the ground, that you could help allocate the money."

"All over the world? I'd have to think hard on that one. Spread pretty thin as it is." They both knew Paul couldn't turn his back on helping a segment of society he so empathized with.

They returned to a freewheeling consideration of a variety of social ills. Paddy fired question after question. Paul supplied what answers he could.

"I don't have all the answers by any means," he said with obvious frustration.

"I know the scope of the problem and I think I know most of the dynamics, but the solutions aren't that clear. I'm sure of one thing though: money itself isn't a panacea.

I mean when it's used only as handouts. Educational programs, research … sure … but not just handouts."

"Well you would know best. That's why I want you on board with what I'm trying to do—if you could spare the time. By the way, how'd you get involved in this sort of thing?"

"For a combination of reasons," Paul replied. "Very complex and I'm not certain I fully understand it myself. Someday, perhaps we both will."

At the airport, Paul and David were about to board the R.A.F. plane that was on the tarmac. Paddy was there. They gave him back the two revolvers with stealth and a heavy dose of gratitude.

"It was an extreme honor to have met and dealt with both of you," Paddy said. "If I'm fortunate enough to visit the United States, I shall call on you both."

"I hope so," Paul responded.

"Maybe when our project at the zoo is completed," David said, "you can come check on its authenticity."

"It would be a pleasure. And one last thing: I received a call from Leon who brought me up to date on the plans for the drone buildings. He'll be calling all the other committee members, and I gave him the exact position of the site."

They boarded the plane as Paddy waved and then shouted, "Until we meet again, my friends."

All the way to Paris, Paul was possessed by two

unrelated elements: one, a feeling that their next meeting was to occur before the zoo had its rain forest. Two was more of a critique: that he had gone from stem cells, murders and World War II residuals to rain forests and social ills. How disparate. His travails had spanned many topics and many countries. In review, he couldn't believe it but accepted it. What could he have done differently, he asked himself. **All** of it was important, and one thing was without question. He believed he'd more than earned the money he expected to receive from *Vérité*.

But two more elements remained: the bombing of the drone complex out in the middle of nowhere, and a serious attempt to determine who masterminded nearly everything he had taken on. A person, a faction, an entire country?

Back at the Montparnasse, Paul gave Sylvie his longest hug and at precisely ten o'clock, Leon called. The *Vérité* chairman indicated that all the committee members said to go ahead with the bombing and to forget sending photos; that he'd already spoken with two Royal Air Force officers he personally knew: the Air Chief Marshall and the Air Commander. He had previously advised them of the meeting of 13, reviewed what was found in Africa, and asked if they would agree to have the area bombed.

Just to be sure, Leon reiterated what had been discovered and both dignitaries expressed their willingness to strike that very afternoon.

The Air Commander said, "Incidentally, Paul, one of your committee members, Radford Plummer, an Englishman as you know, had already passed on the whole scenario to us. And now with your findings, we'll go ahead and destroy the place."

Paul had hardly given thanks and left the phone when it vibrated at his hip again. The caller was a woman who identified herself as the head nurse at the assisted living facility in Gordes—where the prior was now living. Sort of.

"He's very weak," she said, "but insisted on talking to you. I've tilted the upper half of his bed and here he is. I'll leave the room."

Hardly audible, the prior said, "Paul? It's me. Dom."

Paul put his finger in his other ear, hoping to hear better as the prior went on. It didn't help much.

"I don't have much time left, if you know what I mean, and I have to get some things off my chest while I can. First of all, remember the meeting we had when you came here? The six things you mentioned?"

The voice sounded weaker and weaker.

"Yes, Dom, I remember your responses very clearly."

"Well, it was all an act on my part. Every damn thing … sorry … all my responses, even my taking made-up notes. As senior histarian for the whole world … the whole world … none of it was new to me. Wait

a second ..."

Dom resumed by saying, "I slipped down in the bed, but I'm fine now." Paul believed it was, rather, a pause to catch his breath. But Dom did, in fact, sound a bit less feeble.

"I can't list everything but I can try to list some. The big thing to admit is that I was involved in all the bad things you've had to go through ... to witness ... to hear about. I had a hand in all of them. I gave the orders and my colleagues followed through. Stem cell research, the stolen cabinet, murders, banking problems, even the behavior of Marlene with *you*. She tried to liken herself to Evita but failed miserably. I hate the Evita legacy because she promoted German and Vichy French salvation in Argentina. She did very little for Japan. It's a question, Paul, of Germany versus Japan and I'm on Japan's side. There are groveling dogs there still begging for forgiveness, and just the opposite. I wouldn't give a nickel to either group. The differences between the countries? Germany: the creation of a super race. Japan: end all the misery, which I'll explain in a minute ... do I have a minute?" His breathing became shallow.

"As for the Swiss," he said, "I arranged to have them punished for their misdeeds through the years—the way they kept foreign bank deposits a secret and so on.

"Now for a couple of other personalities. Albert Kesler? I had him killed because of his writings, which I didn't like. He always favored the German cause. He was

also a friend of an Academy fellow in Paris, Noel Jantot. Noel gave Kesler the cabinet for $10,000, which is about 4,500 French francs. The poor guy deserved some money for a change. The clerk, Durand? I had him kill Kesler because of those columns and the cabinet deal, and then I had Durand killed because he knew too much. And there were other murders, as you know. Leonard Swingeth for example.

"But the worse thing of all is the sarin and mini-drone plan. You've heard my sermon about wars … revolutionary, civil, worldwide. Flaming battles practically everywhere. People, in general, don't deserve to *be* here. Why should they stay? We should do away with the world. They're killing each other off anyway. And if we go ahead with ending it all, what good is stem cell research? So why not just make it simple? End things here on earth. I'm sure there's great harmony in heaven. I give myself up … for all the people who deserve that … that … harmony. Including … you … Paul."

The nurse returned to the phone. "Sir," she said, "I came back to check, and I'm afraid he's gone. He seemed like such a nice man."

"Yeah, he seemed that way," Paul replied.

After he returned the phone to his hip, Sylvie put her arm around him and said she'd been kept in the dark for too long a period. "Hurry, tell me," she pleaded.

Paul relayed all he could remember about the admission of guilt he'd just suffered through. "Funny,"

he said. "I either knew or suspected much of what he said. Except for ending the world. I never imagined he'd go that far."

He looked worn out and Sylvie told him so. She also reminded him that the prior was demented, in her opinion.

"I'd suggest another nap, darling," she said. "I'll handle all calls."

Paul dropped onto the couch. Before drifting off, he said. "The prior? **There** was a guy who certainly lived in the shadows."

**JERRY LABRIOLA, M.D.** lectures extensively on mystery, true crime and forensic science issues, and conducts workshops on the elements of the novel with emphasis on mysteries. After his first exposure to forensic pathology while serving in the U.S. Navy, Dr. Labriola practiced medicine for 35 years and was an Assistant Professor at the University of Connecticut Medical School. A Yale graduate and former Chief of Staff at a major teaching hospital, he also served as state senator and ran for Lt. Governor and Governor of Connecticut as well as the United States Senate.

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